TOMORROW MORNING *by* Anne Parrish

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BY ANNE PARRISH

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"The Perennial Bachelor," etc.

HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
New York and London

TO-MORROW MORNING

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

First Printing, December, 1926
Second Printing, January, 1927
Third Printing, January, 1927

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Chapter One

USUALLY Friday was a day of drooping flowers and fish that had begun to smell, drooping and smelling among dusty gods and goddesses, complained of by those aproned young ladies who were drawing from the antique, and frowned at intently by those whose still-life studies they were. But this Friday the flowers were fresh—snowballs, so hard to arrange æsthetically, dark-blue iris, and heavy-headed peonies, red in the face, brought into town from suburban gardens; and there were no fish except the sardines in the sandwiches on the refreshment table.

The art students, too, were changed and glorified. Mouths that usually were stretched to hold extra paint-brushes under mustaches of charcoal dust smiled sweetly, spoke gently, and bit into sandwiches and macaroons with small ladylike bites, and painting aprons were replaced by best basques and kilted skirts. One girl in particular seemed to shine, from the tips of her bronze slippers to the face bright as pink and

light-brown china just washed in hot suds, under a new hat trimmed with pale-tan wings like two slices of cold chicken. It was one of her trousseau hats, really, but she hadn't been able to resist wearing it to-day, ahead of time, to impress the girls.

"Kate Star, I think Mr. Green is simply charming! I think you're the luckiest thing!"

Darling girls! She would miss them so! She would miss Uncle Henry and Aunt Alice, too, of course. She would miss them very much, and never forget how kind they had been. But the girls, and the Art School! Never again to come in on the train with her package of lunch and a cluster of country flowers, never again to wait for criticism with a plunging heart! But I *will* work, I *will* go on painting. I'll do something to make you proud of me, Joey ——

She could see that the girls were really impressed with Joe. They weren't just saying so to be nice. Joe! Joseph Montgomery Green! She looked at him standing by the refreshment table, holding two glass cups in which slid melting lumps of strawberry ice cream, while he talked to a little cluster of people, impressing them all—Joe in his light-gray suit with three wine-colored pinks in his buttonhole. Now he was making them all laugh! Now he was coming to her ——

She grew weak with that thrilling weakness that flooded her when he was near her. She pressed the warm tingling palms of her hands together, feeling

the pulses throbbing in her finger tips. Her heart—no, not her heart, really, but lower down, although it didn't seem nice to admit even to herself that her feeling, as he came to her, was of having been struck a blow in her stomach.

"*Whew!* I've been catching it, Kate! They're all down on me for snatching you away from your career."

"My career!" murmured Kate, in modest mockery. Still, with her study of onions and a copper saucepan taking the first prize, and honorable mention for the sketch of Nellie Verlaine in Grecian costume, she couldn't help feeling—well, contented. She wished Joe had been there when she overheard two perfect strangers saying her still life was the most finished picture in the exhibition, and that the onions stood right out of the canvas.

"Joe, I just had the funniest experience! Two *per*fect strangers—that fat man and the woman in plum-color—see? No, by the lemonade bowl—well, they were standing here just a minute ago, and she said she thought my still life was the best picture here! Wasn't that ridiculous? And he said the cut onion was so natural it made his eyes water. Of course they hadn't an *idea* it was my picture—I was simply *dying* to laugh ——"

"Well, we're not going to let your gift go to waste, and so I have informed your anxious instructors. They were haunted with visions of you wasting your time sewing on buttons and making pies and generally

spoiling your good-for-nothing husband, but I told them that after you were married you wouldn't have to work and worry beyond the work and worry of producing your masterpieces."

"Oh, Joe, I do adore my painting, but I'd give it up in a second, I'd gladly, gladly work my fingers to the bone for you," said Kate, longing for poverty so that she could show Joe how she loved him.

Joe gave the fingers a squeeze, hidden between brown silk and gray cloth. "I know you would, darling, but, thank God, you'll never have to. Oh, Kate —only two more weeks!"

"Only two more weeks—oh, Joe ——!"

Their wedding was a tiny one. Uncle Henry and Aunt Alice were poor, and Kate was poorer. But Joe with his gardenia and his ways of a larger world shed a glamour, and nothing had ever been seen to equal Kate's bouquet, sent from New York City, as Aunt Alice's Hannah told the next door cook, the girl who was going to open the front door, and the man who brought the ice cream, taking them up on tiptoe for a look at it lying veiled by waxed paper in the bathtub. "Awnge blawsoms! An' de lilies of de valley all shootin' down on little ribbons, an' de maidenhair firm—oh, my! Jes' you smell, Mistah Lee! Stick yo' haid in de tub an' snuff it up. An' ain't it big? Doan see how Miss Kate gwine-a tote it!"

After the honeymoon at Saratoga Springs Joe took

Kate to the small town where he had been born and brought up, but that was new to her—Westlake, with all its kind and curious strangers. In their new house she sat at Joe's desk and wrote.

29 Chestnut Street
Westlake
July 15th

Dear Mrs. Benedict:

Mr. Green and I want to thank you so very, very much for the simply beautiful—

What in the world had Mrs. Benedict given them? Kate put down her pen and looked through the list. Mrs. Benedict, Mrs. Benedict—oh yes, cut-glass berry bowl. Seven cut-glass berry bowls in all, among the wedding presents. Kate loved every one of them, every silver spoon, tea towel, dustcloth; every single thing about 29 Chestnut Street, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Montgomery Green. It was a plain, small house, really, painted olive green with dark-red trimmings, and fragile dark-red balconies, too tremulous to step on, hung outside bedroom windows.

"It's only a makeshift, until we decide just what and where we want to build," Joe told her that first day, opening the front door with its ground-glass panels of stags in the forest, while Miss Smith next door peeped through scrim curtains, and Mrs. Hoagland Driggs, in the big stone house across the street, adjusted her opera glasses. "This is just our little *pied-à-terre.*"

"It's lovely—lovely!"

"One thing I do think you'll like—a surprise, Katie! Shut your eyes and let me lead you!"

She shut her eyes. She would have let him lead her anywhere. A bead portière parted, slid over her, fell together again like tinkling rain; they climbed a flight of stairs, a door opened and shut.

"Now, Kate! Look!"

She looked, and saw the studio that Joe had gotten ready for her, for a surprise—the skylight, starred with a patter of summer rain; the most elaborate easel she had ever seen, all screws and shelves; the fireplace framed in glazed caramel-colored tiles. She saw Joe's shining face, and burst into tears, flinging her arms around his neck, smashing the cornflowers in his buttonhole, covering him with wet, worshiping kisses.

"Oh, Joe, you *an*gel! I'll paint something wonderful here, you see if I don't!"

And she began his portrait the next week. But it didn't get along very fast, there was so much to do—the house to put in order, thank-you notes still to write, callers coming all the time. She couldn't settle to anything in the afternoons, when any minute the doorbell might ring and Lizzie in her clean apron would bring up more cards on the Sèvres plate that had been Nellie Verlaine's wedding present.

Aunt Sarah Whipple came, inclosed in her coupé like a priceless antique only shown to the public in a glass case, and with her came her Victorian-ringleted

spaniel, and her companion, Carrie Pyne, like a woman made of ashes of roses, who would hold together—just —until some one touched her, or a breeze blew on her. Joe's sister-in-law Lulu came, in her mourning for Tom Green, dropping a black-bordered handkerchief, a vinaigrette, black gloves, a card case, a long scarf, here and there about the house as she and her sturdy little daughter Charlotte were shown its beauties. From the cocoa-brown stone house across the street, with DRIGGS cut into the mounting block, where a fountain spattered on an iron umbrella held by two iron children, and the broad plate-glass windows were veiled in lace, came Mrs. Hoagland Driggs, fat, jolly, sparkling with diamonds, full of sly jokes about brides that made Kate blush. Not quite a lady, Kate thought, but she liked Mrs. Driggs in spite of herself, she was so kind, sending over green peas from the garden, and fresh chocolate cakes, and telling so much scandalous gossip. About Mrs. Martine, for instance.

Kate couldn't bear Mrs. Martine. She was sure she put stuff on her eyelashes to make them black. And she called Joe Joey. Joey, indeed! When Kate told Joey, severely, that Mrs. Martine had called, he looked as bland as butter and said she was a fine little woman. *Little!* Kate nearly burst! Joe calling that woman little, when she would have made two of him—well, not quite two, but she must have been nearly three inches the taller.

Miss Smith, who kept boarders next door, was too

humble to come to the front door and pay a real call. But over the back fence she gave Kate clumps of larkspur for her garden, and warnings as to how closely you had to watch Mr. Turben, or he'd sell you moldy raspberries and eggs that had been kept too long. Plunkett's was better, but terribly high.

Too high for her, Kate decided, after Joe explained sunnily that "just for the moment" he was rather hard up. But not too hard up for surprises. Joe would never be that.

One day a patent lawn sprinkler that was supposed to twirl about, twisting and weaving its ropes of water, but which never sprinkled for them beyond a few reluctant tears, except for one unforgotten gush as they bent above it. One day five pounds of chocolates and pink and yellow and pale-green bonbons, with candied cherries and violets filling up the cracks, and lace-paper mats, too pretty to throw away, and silver tongs. One day Mr. Minty, from the Lakeside Studio, to take photographs of the studio at 29 Chestnut Street.

Mr. Minty was charmed with everything, especially the carved Italian chair, the kimona embroidered with sea turtles, and the paintbrushes in a ginger jar, all of which he moved into each picture—the one of Kate with palette and painting apron in front of the easel holding Joe's portrait, the one of Kate reading on the denim-covered divan, the one of Kate pouring tea—pouring air, really—before the fireplace.

"Very, *very* artistic!" Mr. Minty sang, leaping out

from his dark cloth, running forward with tiny steps as if in a moment he was going to spring up on one toe and begin his dance. "The drapery falling a *lee*-tle more careless—there! And the head supported by the hand, easy and relaxed ——"

Kate instantly became an iron woman.

"*Eee*-sy and graceful! Just eee-sy and graceful!" Mr. Minty implored, making weeping willows of his hands before he dove under his cloth. Click! Kate could look at Joe and burst out laughing. Everything was so absurd and heavenly.

"Now a livelier pose—more *joy de veev*, more ——" Mr. Minty's head went on one side, his eyebrows arched, his thumbs and forefingers pulled an imaginary Christmas cracker in the air. Click! It was a splendid afternoon.

So was the Saturday afternoon when, instead of posing as he had promised, Joe brought home the livery-stable runabout and took her for a drive. Lizzie and Miss Smith and Mrs. Driggs were all at their windows to see them start off, and Kate waggled a hand at fat little Hoagland Driggs, Jr., tricycling on the sidewalk. Joe in his light coat with its big pearl buttons looked as if he were driving the blue-ribbon winner at the Horse Show, instead of O'Leary's old Bessie, and Kate wore puff-sleeved dark-red cloth, for the first September coolness was in the crystal air. Her head was straighter than if a photographer's vise held it, a more than queenly expression of graciousness

glowed through her veil. Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Montgomery Green rolled along under the elm trees, bowing kindly to acquaintances, and out Poor Farm Road to the hills beyond.

"There's the haunted house, Katie."

The house was tall, gray, and silly-looking. It wore an expression of reproachful astonishment, of eyes and mouth open and protesting, like a thin dingy lady, timid and garrulous. Some of its broken windowpanes were stuffed with old quilts—the lady had put cotton in her ears against the autumn winds. It stood foolishly near the road, though all the world lay empty behind it, so their carriage nearly ran over its doorstep toes. "Goodness!" it seemed to be crying. "Oh, mercy!" with its wide crazy eyes and its open mouth. By the broken doorstep a clump of larkspur sent up blue spikes of second blooming, a promise to despair.

"I never saw such a spooky place in my life! Does anyone live there?"

"An old woman, half cracked. She spends her life cutting paper into patterns—they say the house is full of it."

"Well, I wouldn't go in there for a million dollars! Oh, Joe, isn't this fun? But we ought to have saved the money."

"Shut your eyes, Kate. Keep them shut till we go round this curve. *Now!*"

There was the town below them, a few white and

colored shells lying quietly at the bottom of the ocean of blue air.

Joe made her a present of it. "There you are! There's Westlake for you. See the Congregational steeple? There's Cedarmere—Aunt Sarah's—over on the other side of the lake. See the sun shining on the conservatory?"

"Where's our house? Oh, I see it!"

"How does this prospect please my lady?"

"It's *heav*enly."

"What would you think of a house just here?"

"*Mercy!* Wouldn't it be divine!"

"Then that's settled."

"Joe, what do you *mean?*"

"I've had this site in mind for some time, but I wanted to be sure you liked it before I entered into any negotiations."

"But, Joe—we couldn't possibly ever afford ——"

Joe laughed indulgently. "I didn't say we were going to start building this week, Mrs. Green, but things are looking up for me, the future looks pretty bright. I knew you'd like the idea. How about a terrace just here, for the sunsets—the mansion—ahem!—here, of course—we might get DeCourcey Johnson to draw us some suggestions, just tentatively—the stables and kennels hidden by these pine trees ——"

Kate gave a loud sigh, to keep from bursting with delight. And then she sighed again, with happy sadness. How could she bear to leave the house where

they had been so blissful? Good-by, little house, dear little house. I will never forget you.

How strange to know what was under that roof as well as if she had lifted it off by its pale-blue feather of smoke. Lizzie chopping up cold mutton to cream for supper (at least, Kate hoped she was), the teapot round as the silver moon, the place in the tub where the fresh paint had come up with Joe after a hot bath, their great dark bed with all its carved rosettes. Strange to see inside her home from this high hill; to see inside other houses, that looked so placid in the September sunshine; to know that in one Mr. Thornton lay dead, in one Miss Smith had a toothache that made her face look like a squirrel with its cheeks full of nuts. In one the three Misses Mortimer lived a life of terror with their mad old mother; in another Mrs. Driggs had just discharged her cook for drinking the cooking sherry. Better to look at the town from far away, from above, only seeing peace in the sunlight.

She must try to see life that way, too, to see the peace and love between Joe and her instead of letting her worries blot out everything. The worry of Mr. Turben, smiling and anxious about the bills for the last two months. She had been rather haughty with Mr. Turben, because she was sure Joe had said he had paid the July bill, and then it turned out that she must have misunderstood him. The worry of having Lizzie cross as two sticks because of so many dinner parties. Joe *would* ask people, and say, "Give them whatever

we're going to have ourselves," and then at the last moment bring home things like lobsters and mushrooms, and want wine sauces whose recipes were so complicated they made Lizzie mutter under her breath and slam the oven door so the plaster nearly fell from the ceiling. She wasn't cross in front of Joe, of course. Servants never were. She took it out on Kate. And Joe would only say, magnificently: "Is the house to be run to suit us, or to suit Miss Lizzie Kelly? I merely ask for information." The worry of not being pretty, like that Mrs. Martine, with her old black eyelashes ——!

And here was Joe, thinking of her, loving her, taking her out to drive, planning a beautiful home for her—she was ashamed of herself. How could he love her? It was a miracle. Everything was miraculous to-day; a burning bush of orange and vermilion berries with a sheen of purple on them, burning against the passionate sky, a little blue-green beetle that lit on her sleeve, O'Leary's old Bessie, flinging her hoofs about, carrying them home again. Joe.

Chapter Two

AUNT SARAH WHIPPLE'S coachman drove Kate and Joe in the wagonette through the iron gates of Cedarmere, past the lodge, past weeping copper beeches pouring down on the velvet lawn in molten fountains, past wool-work flower beds. There were circles and stars edged with beet-red, cocoa-brown, and yellow-green ornamental foliage, then little rims of Reckett's-blue lobelias surrounding cold pink begonias with wax stems, or heliotrope, widely spaced in rich finely crumbled earth. The earth at Cedarmere was always black and moist, even when other people's flower beds were hard, pale tan. Aunt Sarah kept an eye on her garden. On summer mornings after she had eaten her oatmeal and read the political news in the paper she went out-of-doors, and where the wrens were perching on dipping sprays of grapevine, wren-like Aunt Sarah perched on green iron grapevines twisted into seats, and made the gardeners, busy in the borders, wish they had never been born.

The lawns, the glimpsed grape house, Henderson's bottle-green livery with its silver buttons, affected Kate so that she began to make polite remarks to Joe and to Henderson's back in her society voice, from nervousness, telling them that it was cold for October, that the

days were getting shorter now, and that the sky looked like rain. And when the wagonette rumbled under the porte-cochère and the horses stamped and jingled, her insides fluttered like a flight of birds, and she pushed her hand in its new biscuit suède glove under Joe's comforting arm.

A butler ambled down the steps for their bag—a butler! Joe hadn't told her there was going to be a butler. Oh, Joe, I'm scared to death, but I'll try not to disgrace you, darling. With an uplifted face of disdain she entered the hall.

Carrie Pyne drifted toward them, moaning:

"Well, Kate! Well, Joe! Here you are!"

"Yes, here we are!"

They all laughed vaguely and politely.

"Mrs. Whipple's resting until dinner. She sent her dear, dear love—at least, I know she would have if—Oh, *Kate!* Did you hurt yourself? Those bears' heads are terrible in the dark corners. I don't suppose you'd care for a cup of tea before you go to your rooms?"

"Oh, *no* in ——" Kate began obediently; but Joe broke in, "We would very much, thank you."

"Oh—ah—Harcourt, could you please just bring us some tea?"

"*Tea*, miss?" said Harcourt in an astonished voice.

"Yes, please, just—yes, please. I don't know why Harcourt's always so surprised. We have it ever so often, but he's always just as— *Hm! Hm!*"

Harcourt, still looking incredulous, came back with a lace cloth, which he flung on the tea table crooked, to show his disapproval.

"Was it chilly driving out? It seems so cold for October. As I was saying, Harcourt—*Hm!* Oh dear! I seem to have a frog in my throat. *Hm!*"

Harcourt slammed down the tea tray, and Carrie began a wavering pouring out, murmuring: "I'm afraid it's pretty strong. Two lumps, Kate? I'm afraid the water isn't very hot ——"

Kate sat tensely in her low tufted chair of old-gold satin, with its fringe like sausage curls, trying to keep her cup from dripping—Carrie had slopped most of the tea into the saucer. How easily Joe was taking everything, teasing Carrie, sending Harcourt for matches. She would be like him, perfectly natural.

"What a lovely house!" she exclaimed, startling herself by her vehemence.

Now why had she said that? She thought it was the most depressing place she had ever gotten into. Grand, but so gloomy. A stopped clock over an empty fireplace of marble like *foie gras* full of truffles, family portraits, and paintings of autumn woodlands in heavy gilt frames, these surrounded by plush-lined shadow boxes whose glass turned the dark pictures into mirrors. A marble bust of Uncle Elisha Whipple, ghostly in the cold half light. And those old bearskin rugs, tripping people up.

Blblb! What strong tea! It puckered her mouth—

smocked it! And it was lukewarm. But the rich little cakes were delicious, and Carrie's being more nervous than herself was comforting. She was happy and excited as Joe hooked her into her best dress of orange-pink corded silk. Her hair shone like a horse-chestnut, catching the light where it turned in a French twist or sprang over her forehead in a small curve of bang; her cheeks glowed from a surreptitious scrubbing with a bath towel while Joe was grandly crackling into his shirt in his dressing room. But when Harcourt beat a crescendo diminuendo on the gong that hung in the hall between two life-sized Siamese warriors, she was in a panic again.

Very different now in the drawing-room, with the gold-brocade curtains drawn, and custard-yellow flowers brought in from the conservatory and put about on the small gilt tables. In the fireplace the voices of the fire spoke together—one like silk fluttering in the wind, one like rain pattering on dead leaves. Aunt Sarah sat in a straight chair before it, in black lace and watered silk, and on the back of the chair a parrot, with feathers the color of grass-green banana leaves and eyes surrounded by wrinkled white kid, danced from side to side, pausing now and then to make a sound like a popping cork or to scream, "Car*rie!*"

"Well, Joseph. Well, Kate. Don't kiss me; Benjie would bite you. Don't step on Mopsa, Kate; she's the color of the rug."

"Ca-a-a-*ree!* Oh dear! Ca-a-a-*ree!*"

"Yes, you're quite right, Benjie; she should be down. We won't wait— Oh, here you are! We were just going in."

"I'm *so* sorry, Mrs. Whipple," Carrie gasped, shedding a faint-pink scarf that looked as if it had been wet and then rolled into a tight ball. "My hair just *wouldn't* do— Oh, Joe! Oh, thank you ——"

"At my right, Kate. Joseph must act as host."

They sat silent while Harcourt brought the soup, shaking out the glossy napkins, almost as big as tablecloths. Clean napkins for every meal, at Aunt Sarah's, not a napkin ring in the house. The things the Greens had for company, Aunt Sarah had just for herself—finger bowls at every meal, coffee after dinner, the beds changed all at once, instead of the top sheet turning into the bottom sheet.

Harcourt poured the sherry, and simultaneously Kate, Joe, and Carrie began to talk.

"How are your ——"

"What lovely ——"

"Why, Joe—er-ah ——"

"I *beg* your pardon!"

"I beg *yours!*"

"You were going to say?"

"Oh, nothing, really ——"

"Oh, *please* ——"

"Joseph must show you the stables to-morrow," said Aunt Sarah, her faint dry voice crackling lightly through the polite tumult. "Are you fond of horses?"

"Oh yes, indeed I am!" cried Kate, who had never plucked up courage to give a horse an apple or a lump of sugar, and whose nearest approach to one was a drive with Joe behind old Bessie.

"You and Joseph can have a good gallop to-morrow, then. Kenyon tells me Gypsy Queen needs riding, so perhaps she'll be spirited enough for you, but don't tell me that you're such a sportswoman that you ride astride."

"No, indeed, I don't; in fact I don't ——"

"A more ridiculous exhibition I can't imagine. They say it's less dangerous and tires them less. As if there weren't worse things than exhaustion or falling off a horse!"

"Well, I don't ——"

"I was famous for my riding when I was a girl, and I should as soon have thought of riding on my head as riding astride."

Harcourt murmured in Kate's ear, and she answered, haughtily:

"Yes, please."

"I said red or white wine, madam?"

With head high, drooping lids, and lips that hardly opened, she chose red.

"I hear that that Mrs. Martine rides astride. I shouldn't be at all surprised. She looks very coarse."

Dear, intelligent Aunt Sarah! Dear Carrie, not so intelligent, but even dearer, moaning: "Oh yes, I'm

afraid she *is;* such a loud voice and such high color ——"

"Oh, now, come, Aunt Sarah; she's just a fine, jolly little woman."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Impulsive, so that she's misunderstood sometimes by the other ladies, but the kindest heart in the world."

"And that's so lovely," said Carrie. "She always did seem to me so sort of—well—kind-hearted."

Carrie really is an awful goose, Kate thought, helping herself to *entrée.* What's in this? Mushrooms and sweetbreads, but what else? I wonder if I could show Lizzie. Oh dear, I hope I haven't drunk too much wine, my head feels queer. I don't a bit like the way that butler looks at me—I know he's laughing, stuck-up thing. How could *I* hear him, mumbling ——?

"Are you doing much painting, Kate?"

"Well, not so much as I should be doing, we've been so busy, but I'm really going to get to work now."

"I imagine there was a good deal to do to make your house livable."

"We thought we wouldn't do very much, since we may begin building almost any time."

"Oho! So you're thinking of building, Joseph?"

"It's a dream, Aunt Sarah, when our ship comes in."

"Well, please see to it that the whole fleet comes in at the same time. You know Joseph takes care of my investments, Kate, and of Lulu's, since his Uncle

Elisha and Thomas died. We women lean heavily on Joseph. That's the penalty of being the only man in the family."

Kate turned a proud beam on Joe. Oh, bother! There went her napkin *again!* Maybe she could pick it up between her toes without anyone noticing. No, Harcourt had gone after it once more, and must be given a cold inclination of the head. Another long pause, while the gold-incrusted wineglasses were refilled, and dark-blue plates with gold latticework and monograms changed for plates with claret-colored borders surrounding ladies in chiffon scarfs on clouds. Joe didn't seem to mind the silences. He sat there eating grapes like plums, smiling a little at his own thoughts. Kate sipped her wine nervously, and then remembered that she hadn't meant to drink any more. Was her face red? It felt like fire. What *could* she say? "How beautiful your dahlias are!" "What enormous grapes!" "Doesn't it seem strange to think that winter will soon be here?" She was torn between shyness at the sound of her own voice and nervousness at the pauses in the conversation.

"Doesn't it—?" and "Did you—?" she and Carrie began together, and then with polite cries and laughter dodged to look at each other from side to side of the high centerpiece. She was homesick, impressed, nervous, and tense, and she wouldn't have been missing it for anything.

But the next day was pure bliss, drawing up to 29

Chestnut Street with stamping and jingling, the wagonette like black looking-glass drawn by bay looking-glass horses, Henderson touching his looking-glass hat and really beaming at Joe's tip and Kate's gracious good-by. Joe had shown her the wonders of Cedarmere that morning—the tidy potting sheds; the cold frames where big violets pressed their faces to the moisture-beaded glass like children looking out of windows; the grape houses with their childhood smells, growth, earth, damp warmth; and the gardener had cut them the grapes and flowers they were bringing home.

Beautiful home, so small and inconvenient, how Kate loved it! She ran all over it, free and relaxed, making as much noise as she liked. Up to their room—everything unchanged, although she felt as if they had been away for years; the bureau with its little balconies and terraces, whose mirror had reflected such an anxious face yesterday as she put on her hat; the volume of Tennyson with which she had tried to calm herself, still open in her chair where she had left it when she leaped at Joe's call, stopping in mid-verse, stopping here:

> Heart, are you great enough
> For a love that never tires?
> O heart, are you great enough for love?

She read it again, with soft bright eyes. Oh, please, God, make my heart great enough to love Joe that way always! Make us both like that.

Then down to the kitchen, to show off graciously to Lizzie, making cup custards for supper.

"Did you ever *see* such grapes, Lizzie? I'm just going to slip over to Miss Smith's with a bunch, and a few of these roses. Of course Mr. Green's aunt has wonderful conservatories. You must have a little bouquet for your room—there! And a piece of heliotrope, that smells so sweet! Smell! Isn't that de*li*cious? I think I'll just take Mrs. Driggs a bunch of grapes, too. You can't get Black Hamburg greenhouse grapes like these at the store, no matter how much you're willing to pay, but of course Mr. Green's aunt— That leaves one bunch for us, and we'll have that for dessert to-night. Oh, but you've made those nice little cup custards! Maybe we'd better have those to-night. I think Mr. Green's a little tired of hothouse grapes, we had so many, and we can save this bunch for to-morrow."

Chapter Three

OF COURSE they had had lots of dinner parties before, but none so important as this evening's, because Mr. Donner was coming, and Joe said they must make a good impression on him—he could be so helpful in a business way. He was interested in mines —silver mines. Kate would have been more impressed if they had been gold mines, silver seemed rather half-hearted; but she could see that Joe, who usually entertained his guests as easily as a blossoming apple tree entertains the bees, was really nervous about to-night.

That was why everything was going wrong, she thought, pulling the rather frost-bitten chrysanthemums out of their bowl and beginning to rearrange them. They had looked pretty in Miss Smith's back yard, springing and looping in a twilight dim with the smoke of autumn bonfires; she could make them sound pretty in her mind. "Sprays of copper and cream-colored hardy chrysanthemums." But here, in a silver bowl on the dinner table, they just looked stiff and scrubby.

That was the way she looked, too, she thought, struggling up through the orange-pink corded silk. Not a bit of color in her face, between those two sunset clouds of sleeves, and her hair as dull as if she'd

used it to dust the furniture with. And she'd go on getting uglier and uglier now, for months and months, and feeling worse and worse ——

She was standing by the stove, an apron over her dress, frying croutons, when she heard the front door slam, and a moment later Joe's cold fresh face was against her scorched one.

"I stopped at Clark's and got some roses for the centerpiece."

"Oh, *Joe!* They're so expensive! And I've got the table all fixed!"

"Well, we can change it—we want things extra nice to-night. I will, Kate."

"No—Joe! Joe! Wait! Annie, can you just finish these? Don't let them get too brown. Joe! You go and get dressed, or you won't be ready."

And that kept him out of the way a little while. But when he was dressed he was wandering into the kitchen to ask if there was enough champagne on the ice, and where the decanter for the brandy was, until Lizzie was nearly distracted. And changing the dinner cards—Mrs. Cuthbert wasn't amusing enough to be on Mr. Donner's other side; Mrs. Palmer wasn't pretty enough.

"Where did you put Mrs. Martine, Kate?"

"Now, you're sure you understand, Annie? Light the candles just the very last minute before you announce dinner, and you *will* be careful of the candle shades ——?"

"Yes, ma'am, just like all the other times."

"And you remember what comes first?"

"Yes'm, caveat on toast."

"Kate?"

"What *is* it, Joe? . . . On your left."

"How about putting her on Donner's other side? Look, Kate, I've put Mrs. Martine here."

"That makes Mr. and Mrs. Palmer sit together."

"Oh, so it does. I guess we'll have to leave it the way you ——"

"Joe *Green! Oh* ——!"

His outstretched hand knocked over a glass of water. The gray stain widened. Kate burst into tears.

"Why, Katie! It's only water!"

"It's ruined the table, and it's too late to do anything now. And I simply slaved to make it look pretty ——"

"But it's fine—all the little dinner cards you painted, and everything ——"

"It's ruined!" Kate sobbed.

"Just let Lizzie mop this up ——"

"*Lizzie!* If Lizzie manages to get through cooking the dinner I'll be thankful. She has one of her sick headaches— Look out, Joe! If you'll just get out of the way. And Annie Sullivan and I have had to do pretty nearly *every*thing. Joe! *Joe!* Don't take one of the dinner napkins ——!"

"Stop crying, Katie! Hurry and wash your face!"

"Oh, I wish I was dead!" she wailed, running up-

stairs, sopping her eyes with hot water, hardly getting down again before Mrs. Martine was announced.

So handsome and sparkling, she made Kate feel more plain and ill and stupid than ever. Mrs. Martine tactfully ignoring Kate's floury nose and red eyelids, talking smilingly to Joe about "your little wife," being charming to Mr. Donner, and making Kate long to step on her heliotrope train as they went in to dinner.

They filled the small dining room so full that heads bowed like poppies in a windy wheatfield as the platter of guinea chicken went round. Kate pretended to eat, pretended to know what Mr. Donner was talking about, turning to him a face of fixed brightness, while her toes curled in their satin slippers. That soufflé, that soufflé! Why had she ever let Joe persuade her to have a soufflé to-night, instead of nice safe ice cream from Goff's? Joe said ice cream wasn't interesting enough for Mr. Donner, but she couldn't believe there was anyone in the world who wouldn't be interested in ice cream. Lizzie did make good soufflés, but she never had made one for a dinner party before, only for supper when they had something simple like cold meat and she had nothing else on her mind. And to-night, with her headache! Kate saw a black sunken crust, with swimmy liquid underneath ——

Joe didn't seem to be worrying any more—of course not, with Mrs. Martine leaning all over him, half out of her dress. But I'm sorry I was so cross to you before dinner, Joe. And the tea-roses are lovely, a million

times prettier than those horrid old chrysanthemums. But I did feel so sick ——

"Is this your first Westlake winter, Mrs. Green?"

"Yes, my very first."

"You'll find our climate rather severe, I'm afraid."

"Yes, I expect I'll feel as if I were making a dahsh for the North Pole every time I go out."

"*Dahsh!*" She could have burst into tears again! That's what came of trying to use a broad a, like Joe and Mr. Donner, and she couldn't say, "I know better, really, only I'm nervous." Her face flamed as she turned to Mr. Cuthbert, uncomforted by the superlative soufflé, a golden-brown balloon still gently heaving.

But at last the guests had gone, except Mrs. Martine. Quarter past eleven, and her herdic, ordered for half past ten, hadn't come yet.

"O'Leary's forgotten me, and I mustn't wait any longer. Now, *non*sense, Joe. I won't hear of it. It's just a step, and bright moonlight. Mrs. Green! What are we going to do with this obstinate husband of yours?"

"I really want a breath of fresh air."

"Well, you're an *an*gel, and I'm overwhelmed with gratitude. It's been so lovely, Mrs. Green. *Look* at that moon! Don't stand in the door with your bare neck. Joey, did you ever *see* such a moon?"

The front gate clicked. *Joey, did you ever see such a moon?* Kate banged the fire screen in front of the

soft ash of vermilion and gray, and caught up a forgotten coffee cup from the top of the piano. *Joey, did you ever see such a moon?* The orange-pink roses had opened wide in the warm room, showing their golden hearts. She put them in deep water, brushing her hot face against their coolness. Tears stung into her eyes.

She was hungry—she hadn't been able to eat anything at dinner. She found some left-over cheese straws, and ate one. How *could* she have said dahsh? Oh, she was tired! And to-night, of all nights, after what Doctor Wells had told her that morning, Joe had left her alone. She bit into another cheese straw, while the tears poured down her face, but she couldn't swallow it. Her head went down on the kitchen table.

I want to go to bed, but I'm too tired—too tired ever to move again. Lots of women die when they have babies—perhaps I will. Oh, I'm so scared, I really am scared. Joe, why aren't you here? I need you ——

She began to relax. The warm quiet kitchen surrounded her, still and safe. The guinea chicken must have been good. Mr. Donner had two helps. Oh, that awful broad "a"! And Joe's roses were so pretty. Perhaps I'd better ask Mrs. Driggs over to lunch to-morrow, so as not to waste them—she's always a little touchy after we've had a dinner party, and if there's enough guinea chicken to cream ——

Tock tock tock tock. She couldn't see the clock, but she knew it was late. She must get up to bed

before Joe came home from his moonlight gallivanting. And while her body stayed motionless she saw herself climbing the stairs, taking off her tea-rose-colored gown, getting into the wide lonely bed.

Oh, I'm so lonely! My little precious baby, I'll love you so much; you'll comfort mother in her loneliness. How will Joe feel when I tell him? Oh, how can I tell him? I don't know how, I don't know how! How *could* he have gone off with another woman to-night of all nights, after I'd slaved and slaved to have the dinner nice for him, when I felt so dreadfully? I don't believe she ever ordered the herdic at all.

The front door shut, and Joe called her.

"Kate! Katie! Where are you?"

Then she heard him in the dining room, and made herself begin to sob again.

"Why, my Katie! What are you doing out here in the kitchen? What's the matter?"

"N-nothing."

"Tell me, darling."

"Nothing. Oh, Joe! I'm so hideous and stupid, and I feel so sick, and I wanted to tell you something, and you went off with her ——"

"Kate, you're crazy! You're lovely looking."

She lifted her face, mottled from crying, a strand of hair stuck to her wet cheek, her eyes and nose red and swollen, and saw that he miraculously meant it.

"I had to go home with her, you know I did, but I

nearly cracked my jaw trying to keep from yawning, I was so sleepy."

"Oh, Joey ——!"

"Here's my handkerchief—blow!"

And suddenly, laughing, crying, arms tight about his neck, it was the easiest thing in the world to tell him.

"We're going to have a baby!"

If I live to be a million I'll never be so happy again, she thought, her wet cheek against his cheek, their arms around each other, close, close together in the heart of their crystal moment.

"She'll be like her mother, darling."

"No, he's going to be like you."

"Oh, Kate, I love you!"

"Joey, I was so cross to you before dinner. I'll never be cross to you again."

"You're perfect ——"

"The roses were so pretty, so much prettier than those old chrysanthemums—and you were right about ice cream, Joey. Mr. Donner said he was so glad we didn't have it; he said it always gave him a pain between his eyebrows. Oh, Joe, I do love you!"

"You made him have a splendid time. I know he's going to help me, Kate. I'm going to make lots of money so that you and the baby can have everything in the world. Now you must come to bed, my sweet; you're tired."

"Yes, I'll come." Her wet crumpled handkerchief,

falling as she got up, reminded her that once, unbelievably, she had been jealous, had doubted Joe's love for her, and she made him a little present in atonement.

"Mrs. Martine looked awfully pretty to-night."

And Joe gave her a present, too, saying, beautifully: "She's getting much too fat."

Chapter Four

SNOW fell, covering the scarred earth with its deep and merciful white. The baby will love the winter, Kate thought, looking out at the snow-thickened branches, the white fur hats on the gateposts, little Hoagland Driggs with his red cheeks and red muffler being pulled past on his sled by the Driggs' hired man. She was miserable, she was frightened, tears came for nothing at all, but deep in her heart lay a still clear happiness, a promise she never doubted.

Spring came, with mud and crocuses. Kate felt well and cheerful again, strolling in what she tried to remember to call the garden, instead of the back yard, feeling the delicate warmth of the sun; or lying on the studio divan, listening to the rain on the skylight. She had her days of despair, orgies of gloom when she planned with tender sorrow for her motherless baby and bade poor Joe exalted farewells; she had hours when she was gossiping with Carrie, eating something she liked, or reading the new novels Joe brought her, when she forgot completely that she was going to do such an important and grown-up thing as have a baby. She had breath-stopping moments when she was caught up, beyond words, beyond thought, to look wide-eyed into the blazing sun.

Summer came, with its gift. Joseph Montgomery Green, Jr., was born in July, when the stars began to drown in the first faint light.

He was a good, healthy baby, existing as peaceably as possible through Kate's panics. If he cried she was frantic with worry; if he slept quietly her heart would stop, she would catch him up from his crib to make sure he hadn't died in his sleep. Lizzie and Joe were sent after Doctor Wells at all hours of the day and night. Mrs. Driggs was always "slipping over," herself, or sending little Hoagland to inquire:

"Why, Mrs. Green, why, mamma says to tell you she saw the doctor's carriage and she says is anything the matter with the baby, and, why, mamma says is there anything she can do, she said to say."

Mr. and Mrs. Driggs were kind—forgiving, too, for Joe wouldn't ask them to dine, and of course they knew every time the Greens had a party.

"Oh, you don't know what it *is* to have a baby!" Kate, happy, important, worried, would tell Carrie and Miss Smith with unintentional cruelty. "The responsi*bil*ity! Look, Miss Smith. *Ought* his head to wabble so?"

"Oh, my *dood*ness, but it was a ducky-wucky-wuck, so it was!" Miss Smith cried, adoring across the fence. "It was just the booflest baby that ever came to town, wif dose dreat bid blue eyes!"

"And our fat pink cheeks!" Carrie Pyne moaned.

"And our *legs!* Have you seen our great big fat legs, Miss Smith?"

"I dess his papa and mamma don't like him one little bit!"

"He says, No, Miss Smith, they just think I'm a little ugly-mug. They think I'm a little good-for-nothing nuisance, and they're just going to give me to the rag-man," Kate replied, complacently, while Jodie looked at the world with wide opaque blue eyes, drooling dreamily, or buried pink fingers in Miss Smith's dusty frizz.

Joe brought home presents for his little boy—fishes and swans and frogs to swim in his bath; a bell-hung Punchinello with a squeaking stomach, dressed in white-and-scarlet satin, a lamb bigger than Jodie, mounted on its wheeled green meadow. And later, when Jodie was teething, not able to sleep, it was his father who could soothe him.

"You go to bed, Katie. I'll get him off."

Kate, sinking into peace, would hear him singing, hoarse with sleepiness:

"Daddy wouldn't buy me a bow-wow, wow wow,
Daddy wouldn't buy me a bow-wow, wow wow.
I have a little cat, and I'm very fond of that.
But I'd rather have a bow-wow wow wow wow wow
Daddy wouldn't buy me a bow-wow, wow wow ——"

until tired mother and tired baby were both asleep.

They took Jodie down to the Lakeside Studio, to be

photographed. He posed all alone, without a stitch, on Mr. Minty's black fur rug. His eyes were round with astonished interest. Mr. Minty said he had never seen such a good baby.

When the photographs came home, mounted on pale-gray cardboard, with "Fred E. Minty, Westlake," in silver loops, Lizzie was scandalized. "I think it's shameful," she told Kate, severely. "Not even a didy on him!" But Kate thought they were beautiful. She wrote "Joseph Montgomery Green Jr. 6 months old" on their backs, and sent them, glorious Christmas presents, to Aunt Alice and Uncle Fred, to Nellie Verlaine.

Jodie's first Christmas!

Joe had the most beautiful tree from the woods behind the haunted house, brought swishing over the snow. It stood in the parlor among all their little things—the bamboo table, the bead portière with its pattern of storks, the wrought-iron piano lamp and its ruffled shade of terra-cotta silk. Beautiful, simple, filling the house with the scent of the forest.

Joe and Kate trimmed it on Christmas Eve with the ornaments he had bought—silver bugles, rosy bubbles, gold and silver stars. Long silver strands dripped like rain from the dark-green branches, and colored wax candles slanted drunkenly.

Lizzie was allowed—was urged—to bring her married sister, Annie Sullivan, and the little Sullivans, in to see it. Annie was satisfactory under coaching, and

the children, who looked on its wonders with a calm that Kate was unable to shake, were reported to Joe as having been "*abso*lute*ly* speechless! If you could have *seen* those little faces!"

She did her best to make Charlotte and Hoagland go into ecstasies.

"Isn't it a lovely tree, Charlotte?"

"Yes, thank you, Aunt Kate."

"Did Santa Claus bring you a beautiful tree like this, Hoagland?"

"Our tree's bigger," said Hoagland, firmly.

"See all the little icicles!"

"Those aren't icicles; they're glass."

"And see the little wax angel, Charlotte. Isn't that sweet? And see all the lovely Christmas presents Santa Claus brought little Jodie!"

"Did he bring him a pair of skates?"

"Why, no, Hoagland! Jodie's too little to skate yet."

"Santa brought me a pair of double-runner skates."

"Well, wasn't that kind of him? And see the little silver sailboat, Charlotte—see, when Aunt Kate shakes the bough it goes up and down as if it were sailing over the waves, doesn't it?"

"Yes, Aunt Kate."

"Mrs. Green. Mrs. Green. Mrs. Green ——"

"Yes, Hoagland?"

"Did Santa Claus bring Jodie a Regina music box? I gave Jodie that cow. It goes *moo!* Look! When

you twist its neck. It cost fifteen dollars. Did Santa bring Jodie a magic lantern? Mrs. Green. Did Santa bring Jodie a magic lantern?"

Carrie Pyne was the one really satisfactory person to show off to, so admiring and impressed.

"Look, Carrie, this umbrella, with a duck's head for a handle—the bill is real amber, if you please! It's made in England. Joe says English umbrellas are the best. Did I show you this fan? He gave me this, too —did you ever? Look at the way the spangles shine when I wave it; it's even prettier at night. And look, my dear! Seed-pearl earrings! Really I had to scold him."

"Kate Green, I never saw such beautiful things in all my life! You certainly are a lucky girl."

"And that isn't all, Carrie. Will you look at this silver toilet set? See, brush, comb—everything! Buttonhook! Everything you can think of."

And then she was filled with remorse—boasting to Carrie, who had so little, when she had everything. Her present to Carrie had been the silk workbag Nellie Verlaine had sent last Christmas; it was pretty, Dresden silk with blurred pink roses and gray leaves, but who on earth would want it? She hadn't. She had said in a musing voice: "See, Joe. From Nellie Verlaine. I think it's very pretty—really *very* pretty," and put it back in its tissue paper again, and there it stayed until she wrapped it in fresh tissue, with scarlet ribbon and a sprig of holly, not one of the sprigs with

the most berries, and a card saying, "Merry Christmas to Carrie with Kate's best love." And here was poor Carrie saying with a beaming face that it was her nicest present. She was ashamed of herself.

On Christmas night Joe lit the candles on the tree. They shone reflected in the baby's eyes as he lunged in his father's arms with reaching hands; they shone through his silky fuzz of hair, making a halo. And suddenly Kate felt as if her heart had cracked in her side from terror. Is it a sign? Does it mean my baby's going to die? Oh, don't let my baby die!

Some day my baby must die.

"Joe! Give me Jodie!"

She grew weak with the exquisite reassurance that flooded her from the warm sweet weight of her child's body. His lashes lay on his round pink cheeks, one dimpled hand with its creased wrist fell relaxed on her knee. To hold him, this way, safe ——

I wish I could keep him safe forever! If there is sorrow coming to my child, I wish I could take it instead.

Joe was puffing out the candles; wax had dripped on the fallen balsam needles on the rug, and a branch of the tree that had caught in a candle flame made the air aromatic. He threw a pine log on the fire, and the flames licked around it.

How lonely we are, Kate thought. Oh, what was the matter with her to-night? These gloomy thoughts —she must be tired. But it was true. Here were the

two beings closest, dearest to her in all the world, and she was utterly apart from them—her husband, smoking his pipe, looking into the fire, her sleeping child, shut in sleep like a closed bud that holds its secret and its promise. Speak to me, speak without words, my darlings!

A log fell apart, the fire leaped up, shining on the topmost star of the Christmas tree. Up there, above the shadowy green, it seemed to float, a real star in shadowy darkness, a star of hope, to lead travelers on through the dark.

Chapter Five

THE children were playing "statues" on the Driggs lawn. "Furious Rage!" Laddie Baylow called, spinning them around, whirling them off into space, while the Greens' old Shep dashed among them, barking, wagging his tail. Each child fell into position, trying to stop giggling long enough to look raging and furious. Dotty Jackson was best. "Beautifulness!" And they went whirling into new positions, the boys being silly, stretching their mouths and rolling their eyes. Charlotte really tried to be most beautiful, staggering about longer than she need, and flinging up an arm in what she felt was a graceful manner, hoping that Hoagland was looking at her. And she felt warm and glowing when Dotty, in spite of the fact that Charlotte was a plain, solid child, with spectacles, and hair cut like a boy's under the two bunches of pale-yellow shavings she had stuck beneath her hat over each ear, chose her as most beautiful.

Jodie staggered about, reeling in exaggerated circles, copying the big boys. His old straw sailor hat bumped against his shoulders, hanging from a knotted elastic around his neck; he was so hot that his hair stuck in damp points on his forehead.

The air was drenched with the perfume of lilacs;

there was a smell of wet dust from the street where the watering cart had passed. In the beds of dark earth that bordered the cement path leading from the gate to the front porch, Noble, the Driggs' hired man, had that morning set out clumps of pansies from Clark's, each clump wide apart and surrounded by a moat of muddy water, and newly-set-out pansy plants circled the fountain where the two iron children took shelter under their iron umbrella. Charlotte always pretended that she was the little iron girl, and Hoagland the boy. And Hoagland liked Charlotte best of all the girls, and used to take her to drive in his pony cart, drawn by small Prince with his deep bang and tiny fleet feet, while the other children escorted them on foot, chanting:

"Charlotte's mad, and I am glad,
And I know what will please her—
A bottle of wine to make her shine,
And Hoagland Driggs to squeeze her!"

They would all trail downtown to McCardle's, for sodas, scrambling up on the high stools, Charlotte giving Jodie a boost, choosing wild cherry or blood orange —adventurous, almost frightening names—blowing through straws into their sodas to make them bubble and foam. Hoagland generally paid for everyone. "Wait till I go in and tease mamma for some money," he would say in a businesslike way before they started. Sometimes he had two or three sodas at a time. Once

he rode Prince right up to the soda fountain. Mr. McCardle didn't mind. He liked having the children come to the drug store, and sometimes gave them presents—cardboard fans like giant pansies, with his advertisement on the backs, or tiny sample bottles of Geisha Girl perfume. "Mr. McCardle will give the children all the plain soda they can hold, and more," Kate told Joe.

Charlotte was calmly pleased by Hoagland's attentions, although her mother was nearly driven wild by Mrs. Driggs' arch references to "the little sweethearts."

In the lilac bushes the wrens cocked their tails and sang their beadlike songs, and under the lilac bush Hoagland sang, too, to charm his love, dancing a sort of breakdown:

"*All* policemen *have* big feet——"

Charlotte watched with placid approval, tying Jodie's shoelace. He was too young to play with them, really, but he always tagged along, and she was kind to her little cousin, with her own calm, firm kindness. Now she shared with him love's offering of sat-upon chocolate creams from Hoagland's pocket, picking out the most noticeable of the embedded pencil leads, elastic bands, and pocket fuzz.

"Hey, kids! Let's play follow my leader! Leader! Leader!"

"Leader! Leader!" Jodie cried, jumping up and down with excitement, not really wanting to be leader,

just copying the big boys. Kate, repainting the porch chairs on the lawn across the street, could hear the children, Charlotte sensibly bossing everybody, and Jodie's voice, happy and excited, piercing her heart.

She straightened up to smile at the two nuns coming around the house from the kitchen, where they had been to see Lizzie, and they smiled back shyly, their round pink faces, framed in stiff white pleats, like two pink-icing cakes in white-frilled paper cases. They moved as smoothly as if they were on roller skates, under the canopy of Miss Smith's white lilac bush that had pushed half through the Greens' fence and arched above the side path. Poor things! They must feel this tide of spring, as she and the wrens and Charlotte and Hoagland felt it, these waves that poured over the little town, breaking in foam of pear blossom and white lilac, and yet they must never answer. How could they look so contented?

Kate bowed sweetly to Doctor Wells, being driven past, and then pretended not to see Mrs. Martine, with her red cheeks and big puffed fawn-colored sleeves, a grass-green veil floating from her sailor hat with the white ribbon, sitting up straighter than a steeple, in a yellow-wheeled runabout, driving a bob-tailed chestnut. She couldn't bear that woman; she simply couldn't bear her. But even Mrs. Martine couldn't bother her long to-day.

She felt so happy, almost like crying, or making little squeaks. She loved the smooth moss-green paint

flowing from her brush, green bubbles glistening and breaking. The thought of the radishes and spring onions from the garden, chill and crisp in their bowl of water on the kitchen porch, delighted her. She had to stop painting for a minute and run around the corner of the house to pull a few more radishes out of the dark earth, guiltily thrusting back one or two still white and threadlike. The twisted bellflower tree in the back yard was almost through blooming, but a few clusters of pale, wide-open flowers gleamed among the leaves, and the ground beneath it, bare because of the shade and the trampling of children's feet, was drifted over with petals. A few had floated out and lay on the vivid mossy tufts of coarse grass. That was the tree all the neighborhood children loved best, playing house under it, hanging by hooked knees from its low branches, while their faces turned purple and the little girls' skirts fell over their heads, showing gathered drawers with Hamburg edging. That was the tree that gave the children gifts—white blossoms and satiny red buds to fill their May baskets in the spring, long pale-yellow apples in the autumn, sometimes in the winter a bird's nest empty except for snow, a feather, a fragment of blue eggshell.

Kate broke off a cluster of blossoms to smell, to hold against her cheek. Why were petals always so cool? What secret of the moist darkness under the earth did they keep?

The children were leaving the Driggs's. She could

hear them calling: "Laddie's going home!" "Dotty's got to go!" "Good-by, kids!" "Good-by-ee!" All so happy, and yet she heard a sadness through the joyous voices.

"Mother!"

"Hello, Jodiekins! Down, Shep! Down, old fellow! Mercy! Jodie Green! What a dirty little boy! What have you been doing to get yourself so hot, darling?"

Feeling his weight against her, his silky head touching her cheek, she was hardly strong enough to bear her love for him.

"Now wash yourself nicely before you go out to Lizzie."

Jodie liked having supper in the warm clean kitchen, at one end of the table covered with a red cloth woven with white roses and wheat and a snowfall of dots. Lizzie had put sprigs of flowering wild currant, smelling like hot gingerbread, in a jelly glass of water on the shelf by the alarm clock. The kettle puffed out steam, the bubbling saucepan kept tipping its shining hat. Jodie was a big boy now, and had a napkin instead of a bib. Lizzie tied it in two rabbit's ears, and it made hammocks under his chin to catch blobs of mush or apple sauce. He told Lizzie all his news, between spoonfuls, and listened to hers, his blue eyes round, a milk mustache on his upper lip.

Out-of-doors, Miss Smith's white lilacs were foamy in the dusk, and Kate could hardly see to paint any

more. But she went on, sopping down the full paint-brush, drawing it along, half hypnotized. This sweet spring dusk, mysterious and stirring. She was aching with happiness, humming, like a plucked string.

The front gate clicked and Joe came up the path. He looked tired to-night, she thought; his shoulders were drooping.

"Too dark to work, Katie."

"I know it is. I was just stopping." She came and sat beside him on the porch steps. "You look tired, Joey."

He sighed. "I am. Spring fever, I guess—and then it's been one of those days when everything goes wrong—you know."

Kate sighed, too, tucking her hand under his arm. She had been so blissful, and now she was troubled, but she would rather be worrying with Joe than happy all by herself.

And she had been worried lately, sometimes with Joe, oftener because of him while he remained care free. If only he wouldn't drink so much! Of course she didn't want him to be like Mr. Cuthbert, spreading his hand over his wineglass at dinners, but as soon as he went into the house she knew he would go straight to the dining-room sideboard, to the whisky in the cut-glass decanter that had been Carrie Pyne's wedding present. He had grown to depend on it so. Not that he was ever drunk, except that awful night after the Mahogany Club dinner when she woke in the gray

dawn to hear a cab drawing up in front of the house, a cab that held Mr. Palmer and a singing, whooping Joe. She could hardly bear to speak to Mr. Palmer after that. She would hurry past when she met him, turning away a flaming face, pretending to be absorbed in the reddening maple leaves, or the half-unrolled bolts of cloth in Small's window that splintered to colored crystals through the tears that sprang to her eyes. Joe hadn't been like that again, but often he was detached, far away where she couldn't reach him, lost behind a dreamy, silly smile.

And she had learned what it was to have a husband who couldn't pay his bills, a husband she could never depend on for anything except that he would be charming. He was a butterfly, a whole flock of butterflies, with a pale-brown one perched on his upper lip, an azure one beneath his chin. And if that smothering dark butterfly net of worry nearly got him—off went the flock of butterflies into the sunshine. The net never caught him, but it caught whoever was near him. It caught Kate every time.

She knew he was borrowing from everyone that he could draw upon, and she was ashamed. She imagined a difference in the way people spoke to them—or did she imagine it? Joe was as cheery as ever, most of the time, still giving her surprises, sprays of gardenias when they were asked out to dine by people who had lent them money, or bunches of white grapes and bottles of champagne when she had headaches from

worry over the bills. Surprises that were always followed by more bills, with nothing to pay them.

But this evening his forehead was as lined as a washboard.

"I'm sorry you're bothered, Joe darling."

His arm tightened on her hand. "Don't you fret, Kate—it's just for the moment. We're all right. What did you do to-day?"

"Well, Carrie came in, for one thing, on her new bicycle."

"I saw her wabbling along Lake Street. How does Carrie always manage to look as if she was escaping from a cyclone in a stranger's clothes?"

"Now, Joe, it's mean to laugh! But she certainly does. She had to come in about some mix-up in Aunt Sarah's account at the bank. You know she's got a worse head for figures than I have, even—Aunt Sarah, I mean. You'd think she'd be good at them, she's so sharp about everything else, but I declare I believe Jodie can count up better than she can, and of course Carrie's no help. It's certainly a lucky thing for her that you take care of her investments for her. . . . What's this?"

"Some chocolate peppermints for you."

"Oh, goody! I was just wishing for some. . . . Joe, *don't;* you'll spoil your supper! Mmm! these are delicious! Look, aren't Miss Smith's lilacs lovely? She says I can pick all I want on this side of the fence. . . . Joe, *please* don't eat those peppermints! . . .

Look at the way the irises have come out to-day. You know, I could actually see them unwrapping this afternoon; a petal would cling, and then sort of quiver and unstick itself. It made me feel all sort of—I don't know what, exactly. I wonder if I could paint my old straw that color? I think it might be very becoming. Do you? Oh, look! the first star! See, over the Driggs's, like a little trembling drop of water.

> "Star light, star bright,
> Very first star I've seen to-night.
> Wish I may, wish ——"

"*Scat!*"

"*Mercy!* Don't ever do that again! You scared me out of a year's growth!"

"It was Miss Smith's cat after that robin's nest."

"I don't believe a boarding-house cat gets too much to eat. It's always at our kitchen door, Lizzie says. I'll tell you what else I did to-day—Joe, I do love telling you things! I painted all these porch chairs. I think they're going to look lovely, don't you? Doctor Wells went by and saw me—I don't know *what* he thought."

"How long has it been since you've done any real painting, Kate?"

"Goodness! I don't know—ages."

"I wish you wouldn't give it up."

He was always trying to make her paint, suggesting subjects, subscribing to the *Art Interchange* for her.

All the back numbers were stored on the shelf of the closet where the overshoes were kept, so many now that when you opened the door a cataract of designs for embroidery, wood carving, pyrography, glass decoration, oil and water-color painting, and colored supplements of Trysting Places and Showers of Roses cascaded out on your head.

"I haven't given it up, as you call it, but if you'll kindly tell me when I have time to do any painting, with making my clothes and Jodie's, and taking care of him, and working in the garden, and doing the things Lizzie can't—you know yourself you won't eat her cake, Joe—and mending and darning and sewing on buttons and trying to keep the house halfway decent ——"

"I know—I know—I blame myself—you have to do too much. Perhaps soon we can have another maid. I do blame myself so, when I think ——"

"Oh *no!* I *love* to do those things, darling! I love to! I really have time to paint if I want to, only I've let it go so long now I believe I'm a little bit scared about starting in again. I keep planning to, and then—I don't know. But I really am going to. I was just thinking this afternoon that I'd like to do a little picture of Jodie, he's so cunning now. I believe I have a canvas. I wonder if my paints are all dried up? I believe I'll start to-morrow morning—no, I can't to-morrow. I told Mrs. Cuthbert I'd make some sketches for costumes for the Masque of May.

Jodie's going to be Jack in the Pulpit, I have the cunningest idea for it. But maybe next day ——"

"Speaking of painting, do you know what I'd like to do? Give a little tea in the studio, just a few people. We haven't had a party for ever so long."

So they had their studio tea.

Chapter Six

KATE decided not to begin Jodie's portrait until the tea was over—painting made such a mess in the studio—but she put the picture of Joe on the big easel, the picture begun five years ago and never finished. And on the walls her art-school studies hung, the fish, the flowers, Nellie Verlaine, onions and copper saucepans, and heads of snuffy old gentlemen that were supposed to be full of "character."

She was out in the back yard so early on the morning of the tea that the dew soaked through the soles of her old satin slippers as she cut branching sprays of larkspur to fill the studio fireplace, under the plaster cast of the Della Robbia singing boys.

Carrie Pyne came wavering in from Cedarmere on her bicycle, to help make sandwiches. They made cream-cheese and olive sandwiches, lettuce and mayonnaise, and Joe had stopped at the expensive Plunkett's and sent home tins of caviar and small yellow terrines of *foie gras*. It was fun making the sandwiches, except when Carrie cut her finger; it was fun companionably eating the buttery, mayonnaisy crust, or having an olive all round—Lizzie, too, and Charlotte, who had been sent to say that her mother had one of her headaches and couldn't pour tea that after-

noon. The screen door banged as the delivery boys came and went with cheerful greetings, and outside was hot sunshine except for the cool pools of shade under the maple trees, and the smell of freshly sprinkled dust in the street.

If only a party was just the getting ready for it—spreading the icing thickly on small spicy cakes, setting a copper bowl of Miss Smith's big marguerites in a shadowy corner of the cool studio, buttoning Jodie into his fresh linen Russian blouse. But there was always that awful pause just before things began, when she felt really sick with shyness and apprehension.

She and Joe waited in the studio. She was sure no one was coming. Everything was ready—the flowers, the punch bowl, the tea table, the cakes she had made, and the wonderful ones Joe had brought home in light square boxes. And Joe so beautiful he made her blink, rocking from heels to toes on the hearth rug, making conversation. No one was coming! And then the first ring at the doorbell pierced them both, went right through them, so that they felt like two little birds on a skewer.

The three Misses Mortimer were the first to come. Kate urged them to have sandwiches, cakes, more tea, loving them for breaking that spell of expectancy, knowing that this would be their supper, too. Poor old frights. The way they got themselves up! Paint, and dirty white gloves, and beaded dresses with bead-

laden threads hanging loose, shedding a harvest of tiny bright black berries that had clung too long to cling any more. And their hats! Picture hats, mock romantic, perched as if for flight on the tops of the three Mortimer heads. They sat there, elegant rag bags, half-starved, gallant, and ridiculous, almost trembling with eagerness as their upper lips lengthened over the thin rims of the teacups, but each remembering always to leave half a cake uneaten. "Poor old *souls!*" Kate thought, and because of the three Misses Mortimer the studio was brighter and more beautiful; she herself felt refreshed, young and beloved.

Aunt Sarah came next, refusing tea, looking at Kate's paintings through her lorgnette, and making no comments. And with her came Carrie Pyne, wearing a much too small green hat, that looked as if she had snatched up a St. Patrick's Day favor and put it on just to be funny. Beaming and breathless, she passed sandwiches to the people who were filling the studio now. Hatty Butterfield was taking notes for the society page of the *Sunday News*. Kate had to send Annie Sullivan for hot water and fresh tea over and over again. People were laughing and enjoying themselves, really staying, coming back for second cups, feeling free and Bohemian, in a studio. Mrs. Martine smoked half a cigarette, pretending to hide behind the herons and snowy willow trees of the Japanese screen, coughing and screwing up her eyes, although

Kate didn't believe it was quite so new to her as all that.

Mr. Donner was there. They had waited until he was back in Westlake. He had been away for over a year, out in Colorado Springs and Cripple Creek. Dull, pompous old thing, Kate thought, and then decided she must have been mistaken as she watched him on the divan with Jodie on his knee. She could see how eagerly the little boy was talking to him, catching his breath sometimes; she could hear Mr. Donner's polite contributions: "You don't say so!" "Well, I never!"

She heard Joe's voice: "We rather think of going to Italy for the winter. No, we wouldn't travel about—just take a villa somewhere by the sea, and live very quietly. I'd like the *bambino* to learn Italian, and Mrs. Green would do some painting, of course."

"Mrs. Cuthbert! So *good* of you to come. . . . Oh, *do* you really? Of course it's just a sketch. . . . Well, that's so sweet of you! Cream or lemon? . . . Doctor Wells! A busy man like you! Well, I do feel complimented. Here's my big man, helping mother. See if you can carry the chocolates over to Mrs. Palmer without spilling them, darling. . . . Yes, in*deed*, Mrs. Thornton. Now isn't it awful of me, I can't remember whether it was one lump or two. . . . Oh, Mr. Jackson! You know, I do think they're particularly fine this year. I put soot around

the roots of mine; I think it makes them bluer; but imagine *you* asking *me* anything about gardening! . . . Yes, Hatty dear? Why, I guess you'd just call it old-rose Swiss with white dots. You're not going to describe *this* old rag in the paper, I hope! . . . What is it, Jodie? Well, just go and tell Lizzie. . . . Mrs. Baylow ——!"

Thank goodness, Mr. and Mrs. Driggs were having a good time. She had asked them nervously, for she knew Mrs. Driggs was touchy about being invited only when no one else or everyone else was to be there. "Well, we'll *try* to get over," Mrs. Driggs had said, doubtfully; but she had been in her mauve silk dress with the Medici collar, and her hat foaming with mauve ostrich tips half an hour before the Misses Mortimer went through the gate of 29 Chestnut Street, an hour and a quarter before the Cedarmere coupé drew up and she cried to Mr. Driggs, napping uneasily among the claw-footed golden chairs and tables and blood-red brocade that made the Driggs parlor look like the lion house at feeding time: "Come on, Papa, we're going now!" Once in the studio, Mr. Driggs went straight as a homing dove to the punch bowl. His wife was giving everyone high handshakes and saying, "Pleased to meet you." Her face gleamed with heat and pleasure; her fat pearl earrings bobbed and trembled; dark crescents appeared on the mauve silk under her arms.

"Mr. Driggs and myself drove over to call last week, but your waiter said you weren't at home, although Mr. Driggs thought he saw you on the side porch," she said to Aunt Sarah. And her husband added: "Say, that waiter of yours certainly is a sobersides, ain't he? Couldn't get him to crack a smile. How about some punch for you ladies? Good for what ails you!"

The tea was being a success. By the relief she felt, Kate knew how she had dreaded it, how frightened she had been for fear people no longer liked them because Joe had borrowed from so many of them. But they had all come, they were all friendly, the tea was a success!

But it wasn't until that evening, after supper, that the real feeling of the party came to her, back in her old clothes, going through the small gate by the hydrant with a plate of cakes for Miss Smith. The dew-cooled air, the stars, insects tremulously calling, Miss Smith so appreciative, coming to the screen door, wiping her hands on her apron.

"Why didn't you come this afternoon, you bad thing? You *prom*ised."

"Oh, Mrs. Green, I said I'd *try*—but Matty had the earache ——"

"Now you always have some excuse, and I'm very mad at you, but I suppose I'll have to forgive you this time."

"Oh, my! what wonderful little cakes!"

"This little pink one, with the silver, has squish inside—be careful when you go to eat it. Mrs. Cuthbert got some on her new dress. I felt awfully. Miss Pyne tried to get it out with hot water, but I'm afraid she only made it worse. This is the kind they call *mille feuilles*—French; it means a thousand leaves, those little fine layers of pastry. This has *r-r-rum* in it!"

"My! I never saw anything like these! But then you always have everything so lovely!"

"Mr. Green brought these home. Look at the little kisses, made like mushrooms. Aren't they cunning?"

"Me, oh my! What next?"

"Your marguerites looked lovely, really *love*ly, Miss Smith. Lots of people spoke of them."

"Oh, them ——!"

"Isn't it a heavenly night? Look at all the stars!"

Miss Smith came out on the back porch and looked at the stars, obediently. So beautiful, so remote. Pussy was trying to get the lid off the garbage can again. Kate, going back to her house through air sweet and fresh as water, looked at the stars, too. And as she looked, her panoply of self-satisfaction fell away, leaving her small and alone, forlorn. What did it matter to this night of stars and dew that she and Joe had had a successful tea, that she had been "wonderful" about remembering poor Miss Smith? What did it matter to a sky full of burning worlds whether Joe and Kate and Jodie Green and Lizzie Kelly lived or

died at 29 Chestnut Street? And she felt that she must reach her husband and her child, that somehow she, helpless as they, must protect them from the indifference of the perilous beautiful night, keep them safe until the morning.

Chapter Seven

NOBLE had driven Mr. Driggs downtown in the sleigh, tucked in under a glossy black bearskin, and already the softly falling snow had blurred the footprints down the front path and the tracks of the sleigh runners. Mrs. Driggs rocked by the window, made sleepy by the warm room and the quivering web of snowflakes, yawning great, gasping, moaning yawns that squeezed the tears out of her eyes. Magnificent even in negligee, she wore a dressing gown of bright purple panne velvet, with coffee-colored lace falling down the front like a brook in spring foaming and cascading down a mountain. On the floor Hoagland lay stretched on his stomach, languidly pasting in his scrapbook pictures from embossed sheets of moss roses, forget-me-nots, little scrolls saying "Remember Me," the heads of St. Bernard dogs, and wrens building nests in old shoes. On the floor about him were a yellow box of Velvets, nearly empty, a strewing of bits of oiled paper from the Velvets he had eaten, several apple cores, turning brown, and two apples from each of which one small bite had been taken. Myrtle, the "girl," was trundling the carpet sweeper about the dining room, pausing now and then to hurl a friendly insult at the shouting canary: "Shut up, squawk-box;

you'll have us all deef!" or to call in to Mrs. Driggs: "The fern looks kinda pindlin' this mornin', Mis' Driggs. I told you you better not try that plant food on it; that feller sellin' it was too slick."

Mrs. Driggs suddenly stopped rocking and peered out intently.

"For goodness' sake, Myrtle! There's Mr. Green going home at this hour—he must be sick or something."

Myrtle stepped over Hoagland and had a look.

"Say, I bet he *is* sick; he's all sort of hunched up, and holdin' on to his side." And a few minutes later Mrs. Driggs hurried to the door to let in Kate, who had run across the street bareheaded, with her golf cape thrown around her shoulders.

"Oh, Mrs. Driggs, I *won*der if I might use your telephone to call up Doctor Wells? Mr. Green has come home with a feverish cold; he's had it for several days; and now he says he has a bad pain in his side, and I thought I'd feel so much easier in my mind if Doctor Wells had a look at him, though he vows and declares he won't see the doctor if he does come; he says he feels too sick to be bothered. How do, Hoagland?"

Hoagland looked up with a glazed expression.

"Tell Mrs. Green you don't feel so good, either. He's all bunged up with a head cold; everybody has them just now. I kept him home from school to-day,

it's so mean out. I hope Mr. Green isn't anything serious?"

"Oh, I don't think so, thank you, but you know how men are. When they're sick they always think they're just about dying."

"That's right! I tell Mr. Driggs he'd be surprised if I carried on the way he does every time I had a little ache or pain."

"A man's just really nothing but a great big boy, I sometimes think."

"That's right!" She shook with appreciative laughter. "Will you call up, or do you want I should?"

"Oh, *would* you? I'm not very used to it. How do, Myrtle! Isn't this a snowy morning?"

"Now you stay right here, so you can grab it the minute I get doctor. Hello! Hello! I want 8—number 8. . . . Hello! Number 8? . . . Oh, all right! She hasn't got it yet. . . . Hello! Number 8? Hello! Central! You know, Doctor Wells's office. I ought to have had the sense to tell her that first off. . . . Hello! Is this Doctor Wells's office? . . . Oh—hold the wire. Here, Mrs. Green, quick."

"Hello! Doctor Wells's office? . . . Is Doctor Wells there? . . . Oh, isn't he? Well, when do you expect him back, please? . . . I said, when do you expect ——"

"Don't put your mouth so close."

"What, Mrs. Driggs? . . . Oh—oh—hello! . . . Well, can I leave a message? This is Mrs. Green,

Mrs. *Joseph* Green. . . . I beg your pardon? . . . Oh. G-r-e-e-n. . . . Oh, Mrs. Wells! Oh, is that you? How do you do? This is Kate Green. I'm telephoning from Mrs. Driggs's. . . . Oh, I'm very well, thank you; it's Joe—could Doctor Wells come and have a look at him? Yes. . . . No, I don't think . . . oh, thank you ever so much. . . . Thank you. Good-by. What do I do now, Mrs. Driggs?"

"See, hang it up here. Now you let us know if there's anything in the world we can do."

Kate hurried back across the street. Jodie was playing alone under the lilac bush, good as gold, making snow Parker House rolls. Kate stopped to stuff a cold wet little hand into a mitten, to tuck a bent red ear under his knitted cap. Then in to Joe.

"And that," she said impressively to Carrie Pyne a week later, "is the last time I've been out of this house."

For Joe was really ill. He had double pleurisy, and Doctor Wells said there was danger of pneumonia and thought to himself of the way Joe had been drinking lately. He was suffering so that he couldn't sleep except when he was given morphine; he couldn't eat, though everyone sent delicious things—quivering jellies, chicken broth, hothouse grapes. He would try while Kate held a spoonful, tears running down sometimes over her cheerful stretch of smile. But it was too hard to swallow. A spoonful of calf's-foot jelly, a peeled grape—that was enough. Kate would stop

outside his door, angrily brush away her tears with the back of her hand, and go in smiling, her eyes shining ecstatically. Poor Joe, dear Joe, propped up with pillows, her old pink crocheted shawl around his shoulders, gasping with shallow painful breaths.

"Look, Joe! From the Mortimer girls." She opened a soiled old satin bonbon box. "Some of Miss Evangeline's nut cakes."

Joe pretended to try to lift one, keeping up the old joke, dear and familiar to them both, about the weight of Mortimer cake. Kate wanted to cry.

Everyone was so kind. Miss Smith came to the kitchen door with a small bunch of bruised-looking salmon sweet peas and a great deal of asparagus fern on the same day that Clark's boy brought a sheaf of American beauties from Mr. and Mrs. Driggs, the kind that cost a dollar apiece, with stems so long that nothing but the umbrella jar would hold them.

Kate moved through her days uplifted, nursing Joe unselfishly and lovingly, but in a glow of noble exaltation. She couldn't help knowing that Doctor Wells thought she was a wonderful little woman; she couldn't resist running down what she was doing in order to have him praise her. She liked having her little sitting room warm and welcoming for him when he came in out of the cold, a small fire of pine knots burning, ivy and geraniums looking out at the snow. She always remembered to offer him Joe's cigars. She was aglow with sweetness and selflessness while he was there,

glad that the mirror over the mantel gave her a glimpse of shining hair and fresh white collar that made her old brown dress becoming, as she sat listening to his instructions about Joe. She was pensively pleased, too, that she had grown pale, that there were circles under her eyes—circles that came from tears of real sorrow, from nights made sleepless by sorrow and love.

Nothing would keep her long from Joe's room. Even when he was asleep she sat beside him, dizzy for want of sleep herself. She must be there when he woke, when his eyes appealed to her for reassurance.

Late at night, alone in the kitchen heating Joe's milk and the water for his hot-water bag, the tears would run down her cheeks; she would shake with hiccuping sobs while she had little comforting drinks of hot milk and bites of Lizzie's gingersnaps. Oh, Joe, my darling, get well, please get well, she thought, filling the saucepan. All that good jelly, we'll never get it eaten! I'll give some to Miss Smith. No, I can't; she sent a bowlful. I never saw the moon so white and big; that misty look means more snow. Oh, I'm so tired. I must get something for Jodie's poor little hands; they're as chapped as chapped can be, from snow inside his mittens. What was it I wanted to ask Doctor Wells to-morrow? I believe he really enjoys coming here. I don't believe he's very happy. Of course Mrs. Wells is very *nice*, but not exactly sympa*thetic*. Two o'clock! I guess everyone else in town

is asleep in bed. Oh, please, God, make Joe get well soon!

Mr. Donner came to inquire, before leaving for Colorado. Baa! Baa! Kate thought, sleepily, listening to his kind bleating voice, looking at his large mild face. Boiled mutton, but no caper sauce. "Yes, indeed, I'll tell Mr. Green—I'm so sorry he isn't allowed to see anyone yet. Thank you—thank you." Baa! Baa!

But she was grateful to Mr. Donner. He had helped Joe so much that perhaps next year all their dreams would come true—the house on the hill, the winter in Italy. Joe was so sure of it that Kate had begun to think of Italy as their property, to feel a modest pride when she read of water bluer than blue, of lemon trees gold and silver with fruit and blossoms. See, Westlake, see what Italy can do. Mr. Donner had a new claim, the Thunder Bird property, that would make them all rich as soon as shafts could be sunk and mining begun. Joe and Kate and Jodie would be rich, Lulu and Charlotte. Aunt Sarah would be richer, and even Carrie Pyne, who had brought her small savings to Joe to invest as an especial favor to her, would have something of her own at last. The thought of how well he was taking care of the family helped Joe more than medicine as he sat up in bed struggling to breathe.

This was the one solid thing he could anchor to in those gray waters where he drifted, between the

times of pain. Gray days and nights when he floated weakly, flowing this way, flowing that way, like a water plant in the tides, only rooted firmly in the knowledge that, after all, he was a good business man, that everything was coming out all right. Who else in town was going to take his family to Italy next winter, for the whole winter? He thought dimly of a peasant nurse in full flowered skirts and streamered cap holding Jodie's hand. "*Buon giorno*, Maria!" "*Buon giorno, Signor!*" The bright skirts billowed away and Jodie's bare brown legs twinkled beside them, fading into the dark bureau, the mirror gleaming faintly in the snowy twilight, the dark oblong of the doorway suddenly glowing dusky gold as the downstairs lamps were lit.

"Joe?"

"Yes."

"Are you asleep?"

"Not now."

"Would you like a little beef tea?"

"No, thank you."

"Some hot milk?"

He moved his head weakly from side to side.

"*Please* try just a little beef tea!"

"All right. Kate—you don't have to whisper just because I do."

"I know; it's silly of me. I don't mean to. Or would you rather have chicken broth? It's every bit as easy."

"All right."

"But have whichever you'd *rather*, Joe. Or would you rather have something cool, some orange juice?"

Kate was a wonderful nurse, he told himself, slipping into the dark waters, numb with the exhaustion that came after the pain, when the bones in his body felt as if they had been pulverized. And then he was swirling in a whirlpool of nightmare, borrowing again, seeing the faces change as he asked, losing everything.

He struggled back into his own room, his own bed. Kate was sitting by him, holding hot milk in a blue cup with flowers on it. A paper pinned on the lampshade shielded his eyes and threw the light on her bright hair and compassionate face. He and she were stretched out on cushioned chairs on the terrace; through blossoming lemon trees they saw the blue Mediterranean, turquoise and sapphire gleaming through emerald and gold and pearl, like that heavenly city in the Bible or somewhere, he thought, impressed with himself for remembering.

The house was cold that week. Kate and Lizzie struggled with the furnace, but there was an edge in the air; the snowy wind came keenly through every crack. Kate, shivering, her nose pink, her golf cape hugged tightly around her, would run into the kitchen to stand with her back up to the stove, drinking hot water, her teeth chattering against the cup. Late at night, light-headed with exhaustion, she would watch the white moon falling down the cold sky, dragging

her after it until she broke away to draw herself up into a cramping knot on the sofa at the foot of the bed, trying to warm herself, too cold really to sleep, too tired really to stay awake, while the sofa seemed to rock under her like a ship at sea.

A day came when Joe was much worse. His fever jumped up; you could hear his loud gasping breathing all over the house. Kate was so frightened that she ran across the street through the deep snow to telephone Doctor Wells, without noticing that she had nothing on her feet but her satin slippers, those old friends, white once, that she had painted black with scarlet heels, and that she couldn't imagine life without, though already the toes had gone all fuzzy. She hadn't been out of doors for days and days. The cold misty air blessed her aching eyelids. There had been sleet in the night, and the trees in the mist were white against gray, streaming up and losing themselves.

Doctor Wells came four times that day. When he went home just before midnight Kate felt the earth crumbling under her feet. Lizzie, with red rims around her eyes, came to the bedroom door with hot soup, and Kate tried to feed Joe, but he couldn't swallow; it dribbled out again. His beseeching eyes seemed to pull the heart out of her body. She stretched her mouth into a wide encouraging smile. "You'll be better to-morrow morning, Joey; you see if you aren't."

She thought perhaps if she read to him he would go to sleep. She got the book about Italy that they had

been reading before his illness and sat down in the rocking chair, wrapped in the old silkolene eiderdown with poppies on it.

" 'Winter had passed: violets poured in blue streams and cataracts beneath white veils of almond blossom; and the warm wind carried the fragrant promise of orange and lemon trees.'

"Joey?"

He was still except for that loud, tearing breathing. She put her head down on the bed by his hand, and when she lifted it there was a dark patch on the quilt.

She opened the window cautiously. The night was held in the soft deep silence that comes before snow. Then a tiny thread of sound was spun from the unbelievable silence, a chime of sleigh bells that drew near, pure and clear as bells of ice, and passed, and died away. Who were those people? Where were they going? She would never know, and she would never forget them.

Later she woke from a deep sleep, sitting up so suddenly that she felt sick and dizzy, crying, "Yes, Joe?" But there was no answer. Joe was quiet; even the difficult breathing was still.

Chapter Eight

"Now the laborer's task is o'er;
Now the battle day is past;
Now upon the farther shore
Lands the voyager at last."

The white unearthly voices of the choir boys, Mr. Strachey's bass booming softly like distant surf.

"There the tears of earth are dried;
There its hidden things are clear ——"

And then words that wove together into a shimmering curtain before the Holy Mystery.

"O spare me a little, that I may recover my strength: before I go hence and be no more seen. . . .

"For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday . . . as soon as thou scatterest them they are even as a sleep. . . .

"There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars. . . ."

Beautiful solemn words, what have you to do with Joe, who loved to laugh, who brought home surprises, who admired himself in Piccadilly collars with white-dotted blue bow ties, who was really greedy about Camembert cheese? Joe, who couldn't pay his bills, but would give away his last borrowed penny. Joe, who loved to boast and show off, who joked so that Lizzie

used to have to run out of the dining room when there was company and she mustn't laugh. Joe, who was going to do so much, so soon. Joseph Montgomery Green, one of *the* Greens of Westlake. Joe, who had been Kate's and now was God's.

Kate kept wanting to consult him about everything, to tell him things, even funny things. All the hushed, solemn voices—if only Joe were there to speak in a natural voice and break the spell, so that she could speak back naturally.

She wanted him to know how people loved him; to show him the sheaf of lilies that must mean bread and cheese meals for weeks to come for the three Misses Mortimer; to show him the basket Mr. and Mrs. Driggs had sent to the city for, the golden basket full of mauve and froglike brown and green orchids, its great horseshoe of handle tied with palms and yards and yards of glossy mauve ribbon. She wanted him to read the wonderful letters his old friends wrote about him.

She wanted him, desperately, to comfort her.

For tiny breathing spaces, in the shallows, she knew that everyone thought she was being "wonderful." She was proud for Joe that St. Stephen's had never been so full for a funeral; she took an interest in the becomingness of her widow's bonnet.

"Kate"—Carrie's solemn face, red-eyed, red-nosed, looked into the room where she was lying on the bed—

"I *hate* to bother you, but Miss Bertha sent up a lot of bonnets. *Could* you try them on now, dear?"

And—faintly, only faintly—Kate was interested in the way the bonnets became her. Joe always said black made her hair look brightest. But how heavy the long crêpe veils were.

"Kate, I can't help it. I *never* saw anything so becoming as that one with the fold of white," Carrie said, thickly, through the wad of her moist handkerchief, and Kate couldn't help thinking so, too.

And then the moment of respite was over. She remembered again, sinking to depth below depth, drowned in the waters of sorrow.

Life seems so solid, until those two seas of love and death surge through one, those deep seas whose tides are at flood, somehow, sometime, for all of us.

Bitterest, most heartbreaking, was the feeling that somehow she hadn't done enough to keep Joe from dying. She remembered his appealing eyes following her and her reassurance, more and more emphatic as her heart turned to ice, burning cold in her breast. He had believed her, and how had she kept her promises? The feeling that she was letting him die had flooded her before, unacknowledged, while she watched him melting away before her eyes—now, now, life is still in him, somehow we must keep it, somehow we can. And yet the unbelievable moment had come and gone, and Joe was dead. They had let him die. So love must feel forever.

The snow lay deep on the ground the day Joe was buried. In the next plot Mrs. Irving's marble angel wore a white fur collarette; there were soft new feathers of snow on the marble wings. The ribbon on the wreath of blue and moth-colored pansies lying on Joe's coffin was all snow stained. Carrie Pyne couldn't help noticing, though she was shocked at herself for being able to see anything. Mr. Partridge had on arctics. She could see them under his cassock. Her own feet were two solid pieces of ice. Her nose needed blowing, but her handkerchief was of no more use, simply soaking. She tried to manage by sniffing.

She stole a frightened glance at Kate. That was the way she imagined sleepwalkers looked, and they said you must never wake them suddenly, or something awful happened.

"I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me . . . blessed are the dead. . . ."

The tears poured down Carrie's face. She had loved Joe. He had been kinder to her than anyone else in the world, joking with her and teasing her, and now he was dead.

The wind twisted black veils, reddened noses, and made the moth-colored pansies flutter. High in the blowing, brightening sky a bird was soaring and floating.

Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped.

Noble took Jodie and Hoagland for a sleigh ride on the afternoon of the funeral. When Kate told Jodie that Father had gone to Heaven he had wept, terrified and bewildered. And now the laughter that followed his crying was too vivid, too violent.

The two little boys were covered up to their chins with the bearskin robe, their breath puffed out in clouds.

"I'm smoking a cigar! Puff puff *puff!* See the smoke? Look, Jodie. Look, Noble. Noble. Noble. Noble. Look! See the smoke?"

"So am I too smoking a cigar! Look, Hoagland! Look, Noble!"

High over their heads a bird tilted and swooped in the wind that cut their faces and filled their eyes with tears.

"What kind of bird is that, Noble?"

"Looks like it was a sea gull. Purty far inland for it."

The wind sounded like the waves of the sea in the pine trees behind the haunted house. Noble stopped the horse so they could listen to it, rushing, dying away. Except for the ringing of sleigh bells as Clara shook herself, there was no other sound in a world silent with snow. Rushing—dying away.

"Puts me in mind o' the days I was a sailor. Giddap, Clara."

"Aw gee! *you* weren't ever a sailor!"

"Wa'n't, wa'n't I? How'd I git shipwrecked on a desert island, then, and nearly git et up by cannibals?"

"*Aw-w!*" jeered Hoagland, but Jodie's eyes were nearly popping out of his head.

"Yessir, I want to tell you I thought I was a goner! It was the year I shipped aboard the *Saucy Sally*, and she went down in a hurricane in the South Seas—never a man saved but me, and I floated ashore on a piece o' mast, more dead than alive, to this yere cannibal island; right purty spot, too, rubber trees, and green and yaller parrots all callin' Polly wants a cracker ——"

"Like Aunt Sarah's!"

"Shouldn't wonder a particle. So anyways up comes the cannibals, dancin' and givin' war whoops— *Hey*, Hoagland, you do that again and we'll be in a runaway! Whoa, there, Clara old girl!"

"I was just giving a cannibal war whoop."

"You try it again if you want me to give you somethin' to war whoop about! There, old lady! There, old girl! Well, up comes the cannibals, with the king at their head—I can see him still, plain as plain, a colored fellah with a big ring in his nose, and a skirt made outa parrot feathers, green and yaller, like I said, and a high silk hat on his black wool, that had belonged to some poor missionary they'd et. And that ain't the worst!"

"What's the worst, Noble?"

"Around his neck he wore a necklace of *human bones!*"

It was a splendid afternoon. Noble bought them maple sugar, and they ate it all the way back to town, together with black hairs from the bearskin and red mitten-fuzz. Jodie ate so much that he was sick in the night. Kate heard him whooping, and went in to him to hold his hot head, to comfort him. And when he was better she rocked him in her arms until he fell asleep, both of them wrapped in the old silkolene quilt that Lizzie brought, the warmth of his relaxed little body melting her, until her tears fell, quietly, slowly.

The sorrow of Joe's death made a new trouble almost unimportant, at first. All the money Joe had put into the Thunder Bird property—Kate's money, Lulu's, Aunt Sarah's, Carrie's—was lost. The prospect had been salted. Mr. Donner had lost everything, had tried to kill himself, but his trembling hand sent the bullet into his shoulder. He had failed in that, too.

No one reproached Joe to Kate, but she was quiveringly sensitive to what they must be feeling, although they were all so kind. Carrie was always at the house, trying to help, sending off notes in the wrong envelopes, making so much trouble by trying not to make any. Lulu was in bed, not able to come herself, but she wrote Kate a long letter on both sides of transparent paper. Kate couldn't make out much of it, but the few words she could read were words of love and sympathy. Even Aunt Sarah made no complaint to her,

and sent great hampers of carnations, wet and spicy-sweet, of velvet snapdragons, scarlet-black and apricot and rose, whose throats Jodie squeezed between his thumb and finger to make them open and shut their mouths. Last gifts from Cedarmere before it was sold for an expensive sanitarium. The servants were sent away, and Aunt Sarah and Carrie, with Benjie the parrot and Mopsa the spaniel, moved into the little house on the corner of Lake and West Streets, with the pump and the snowball bush in the side yard, and Lizzie's greenhorn cousin Bridget Kelly to teach them patience.

Lulu, always languishing, crumpled beneath the blow, and took what money she had left to go to New York for a course of treatments.

This trouble was a bugle call sounding through Kate's despair, waking her to courage. Turning from side to side at night in the big bed, she promised Joe, she promised herself, that she would try to pay everybody back, somehow, if it took all her life.

She worked until her back ached and her temples thudded, helping Aunt Sarah and Carrie move, tacking down carpets, balancing on stepladders. When Lulu went away Kate took Charlotte. The studio was the only room she had to give her. She made up a bed on the divan, pushed the easel into a corner behind the herons and willow-tree screen, and hid the life-class studies in the closet under the stairs, because she didn't know how Lulu felt about the human form. And

Charlotte moved in with her small trunk, the doll's bureau that held four pairs of white kid gloves, and a light-blue sateen parasol with pinked edges that Jodie admired above everything. He marched about the house under it, like a mouse under a flax flower, and only Charlotte's piercing shrieks stopped him from borrowing it to carry to Laddie Baylow's through the rain.

"Of course it's only for a little while," Kate told herself, feeling, now the studio was occupied, that there was nothing in the world she wanted as much as long uninterrupted days of painting there. But Charlotte was in it, a good, square little girl with spectacles, dressed in a brown serge dress with a white guimpe, saying, "Yes, please, Aunt Kate," and "No, thank you, Aunt Kate," and crying quietly after she had gone to bed, from homesickness.

Kate wrote to the men she knew Joe had borrowed from, to ask how much it was, and say she would pay them as soon as she could. And each man answered that Joe had paid him before he died.

Some of them wanted to help her now, but she had a sick terror of borrowing. She would get along without it if she could. She would find work somehow, get orders for portraits, or give lessons.

She tried to explain to Lizzie that she couldn't afford to keep her any more.

"I'm sure I've tried to suit you!" said Lizzie, sniffing, banging the oven door, refusing to look at Kate.

"Lizzie, you *know* it isn't that. I'm poor as poor can be. I couldn't pay you half the time, maybe."

"Well, wait till I ask you for the money," said Lizzie, crossly, climbing on a chair, poking her head into the cupboard, rattling things. "We need baking powder, Mis' Green, I told you that yesterday; and we need cinnamon. Jodie finds the cinnamon sticks no matter where I hide them."

"No, Lizzie, I want you to go and get some nice place with good wages. Nobody could expect you to stay here for the tiny little bit I can pay."

Lizzie's face turned as red as fire.

"Mis' Green, you ain't got no right to speak to me that way!"

And then she burst into tears, throwing her apron over her face, rocking back and forth, sobbing. And Kate cried, too, and kissed her. All the rest of the day Kate was gentle and shining, with pink nose and eyelids, and Lizzie was as cross as two sticks. She put on her hat and her coat—the old burgundy-colored coat from Kate's trousseau—and marched downtown, and that evening there was a wonderful charlotte russe for supper. When Kate asked her about the cream and lady fingers, she banged the oven door and clattered the pans and pretended not to hear.

Chapter Nine

THE playroom had been the library once, and Joe's sets of de Maupassant and Balzac were still in the bookcases, but *Puff the Pomeranian*, the Brownie books, and *Miltiades Peterkin Paul* were in among them. Under Joe's desk was the cave of Jodie's lion, in private life a bamboo footstool, and glass marbles with their clear twisted colors lay on the carpet and felled the unwary. The tricycle lived behind the playroom door. Through the hall, into the parlor, past the piano, and back into the playroom—that made a race course that Jodie pedaled many times a day, head down, cheeks scarlet, sometimes crying, "Giddap, Clara, old girl!" sometimes, "Choo, choo, choo, choo! Dang *dang!*" To take a quick turn through the bead portières, the strands sliding over him, cascading tinkling about him, into the dining room and out again, was a forbidden joy often indulged in.

Now the children sat in a solemn row on the old humpy sofa where Joe used to lie and read. Jodie and Charlotte, and Hoagland, too, of course. He was always there, unless they were at his house. Old Shep dozed at their feet, and Kate in her black dress sat opposite them, about to explain how careful they must be, and why, to begin with, they could no longer have

chocolate ice cream and orange water ice from Goff's every Sunday. This seemed to her such bad news that she could hardly bear to tell it to them. She clasped her hands tightly in her lap, feeling as much of a child as they, wanting to ask their advice.

Jodie had been stamping himself with the Brownie rubber stamps and the magenta ink pad Carrie Pyne had given him. Carrie's presents! How Kate dreaded them! The box of tools, the wild little kitten that ran up the curtains and clung there, spitting and bristling, now these Brownies, all over the house, under curtains, behind chairs at first, then out in the open, on white door panels, among the petals of wall-paper roses, so that there had been prohibitions and tears. Now there was the Brownie dude in the middle of Jodie's forehead, the Brownie policeman on the back of one hand, and the Chinaman Brownie on the other, which was also ornamented with a large lead horseshoe ring from one of the crackers at Laddie Baylow's birthday party. From the buttonhole of his Russian blouse a sweet pea hung a long mouse tail of green stem. Now where had he gotten that on this day of icicles, Kate wondered. Perhaps he had been down the hill calling on Mr. Clark at the greenhouse. What a funny, mysterious little boy he was, living his own life, safe in his own world, generally. She wanted to take the round face between the palms of her hands, to kiss the top of the silky head with its plume of cowlick. What did the future hold for her little boy? What weapons had

she and Joe put into his hands? So loving, so terribly sensitive. When from his own world he came into the outer world, became aware of other people, he was so vulnerable. In radiant delight, he was ready to droop at a glance. "I'm afraid he inherits the artistic temperament from me," Kate thought with sad complacence.

A darling little boy, but he worried her sometimes. He had hours of mimicking people, thinking he was funny. That was a trick he had picked up from Hoagland.

"Now, Jodie, that isn't funny; that's just tiresome!"

And Jodie would echo, mincingly, maddeningly:

"Now, Jodie, that isn't funny; that's just tiresome!"

"Mother's sorry she has such a silly little boy."

"Mother's sorry she has such a silly little boy."

Then he would go around the corner to play with Opal Mendoza, the little girl the Chestnut Street children weren't allowed to play with and couldn't keep away from.

"I simply *can't* keep him away!" Kate moaned to Mrs. Baylow and Mrs. Jackson.

"Don't I know it! Laddie acts as if he was bewitched!"

"So does Dorothy. She says Opal has life-sized paper dolls with crêpe-paper dresses, and Mrs. Mendoza gives them all pretzels to eat. But, goodness! that doesn't explain anything! I don't know what's

got into the children. Those Men*doza*s! Nobody knows *who* they are."

"The more I tell Jodie he mustn't go there, the more he wants to."

"So does Laddie. He just up and goes!"

Opal's father was a traveling man; her mother lived hidden by dirty lace curtains. Other gentlemen were at the house a good deal when Mr. Mendoza was away, so Lizzie told Kate. Opal knew how babies came. Opal had seen her father in bed with her mother, and described what she had seen to a scarlet, bewildered group of little girls, squatting, heads together, behind a snowball bush. Opal could beat the boys in a race; she could jump rope longer than anyone, and faster ("Salt, vinegar, mustard, *pepper!*"), her locket with a turquoise set in a star leaping, hitting her chest. Lizzie, going past the Mendozas' on her Thursday out, had caught the enchanted Jodie turning somersaults with Opal, and had dragged him home, followed by Opal's sweet shrill chant:

"*Jo*die is a *ba*-by, and *Lizz*ie is a *bug*-ger! *Lizz*ie's a *bug*-ger! Lizzie's a dirty *bug*-ger!"

Opal's delicate skin was like satin, crusted under her small nose; her ears were dirty; her finger nails were black crescents. Lizzie said she had "things" in her matted spun-silk hair. Extravagant eyelashes curled back from eyes like drowned forget-me-nots. One Sunday, wearing a shirred pink silk bonnet trimmed with dirty white ostrich tips, she turned up at St.

Stephen's for Sunday school. There was nothing to do but put her into the class with Charlotte Green and Dotty Jackson and Gladys Blunt.

"What could I *do?*" wailed Mrs. Partridge to her husband. It is not the first time that a socially climbing lady has caused consternation in the church.

Opal was the only child who didn't have to go home when the shadows began to fall. She would drift up and down Chestnut Street, playing by herself, glimmering through the dark, singing her sweet shrill songs, and respectable children eating their milk toast, brushing their teeth, or saying their prayers heard her, and longed to be out there with her, playing in the night.

It was she who taught Jodie the naughty words that made Kate weep. But Opal had nothing to do with that darkest day of all when Jodie told a lie.

Kate, squeezing warm rain from the rubber bulb sprinkler on the plants in the parlor bay window, saw that a cluster of fragrant waxy buds had been knocked off the lemon tree, a gift of other days from the Cedarmere conservatory, and burst into lamentations.

"Now look at that! Those lovely buds, *just* as they were coming out! I've been watching them and *watch*ing them, and now *look* at them! Now how in the world did that happen? Could that bad little cat have climbed up there? *Mer*cy! I wouldn't have had that happen for the world! Look, Lizzie! This *love*ly bunch of buds! Now how do you suppose that happened?"

Lizzie, coming in from clearing the lunch table, pointed at Jodie, stomach down on the rug, crayoning the pictures in a volume of Chatterbox, and mouthed silently: "Ask him."

"Jodie, do you know how these buds got broken off?"

Never was anyone so small, so flat, so absorbedly busy.

"Jodie! Mother's speaking to you! Do you know who broke these buds on mother's lemon tree?"

Jodie put his head down on his arm, and scribbled with the vermilion crayon until it broke. "Pussy," he said in a muffled voice.

Kate went through the afternoon with a heart like a stone. Oh, Joe, I've failed you, she thought. I've let our little boy turn into a liar. Oh, if you were only here to tell me what to do! She could hardly eat any supper; she kissed Jodie good night with a tragic face.

At nine o'clock, as she sat working on one of the green linen frames, heart shaped and decorated with water-color roses and raised gold squiggles, that Mrs. Martine had ordered for Christmas, a small shaky voice called from the top of the stairs.

"Mother ——" And then in growing panic: "Mother! *Mother!*"

She ran up to him.

"Mother! Mother!"

"Here I am, darling! Here's mother! Don't cry so, my precious! Tell mother what's the matter."

Sobbing, he told her.

"M-mother—it wasn't p-pussy broke the plant—it was *me* ——"

He clung to her; she comforted him, forgave him, until his wild crying was over and he was able, a repentant cherub, to say prayers punctuated by last loud hiccuping sobs.

"Our Father, who art in heaven, Harold be thy Name ——"

"Our Father, help me to be a good mother to my Jodie," Kate prayed with him, in her heart.

After her husband's death she had felt dead in body and mind. She could not sleep; she could not really wake. But her love for her little boy, her hope for his future, pierced through to her, waking her, breaking her.

Now she sat opposite the three children, appealing to them.

"We must all be very careful, children, and save every penny we can. You'll help me, won't you?"

"Yes, Aunt Kate!"

"Yes, Mrs. Green!"

"Yes, mother!"

Jodie agreed from amiability, Hoagland to be companionable. But Charlotte was thrilled. All the heroines of her favorite books were poor—Jo March, Polly Pepper. Her cheeks burned brighter pink, her eyes glowed behind their glasses. She would make money, somehow, and buy butter for their dry bread—

find a recipe for potpourri or wonderful little almond cakes somewhere, behind a secret panel, the way girls did in stories, or paint calendars with sprigs of holly and sell them for Christmas presents. She saw herself cooking—up to the elbows in soapsuds—singing as her hot iron went to and fro, making its shining road, like the girls in Mrs. Whitney's books, who were all so poor, and lived in such an atmosphere of roses and raspberries and fresh white ruffles. "Goody! Goody!" she thought, exalted. "We're going to be poor!"

"And we mustn't expect Santa Claus to bring so much as usual this year—Oh, he'll *come*, Jodie, of course he'll *come*, but we mustn't be disappointed if he doesn't bring so many toys as last year."

A quivering Jodie relaxed as Hoagland and Charlotte rolled amused eyes at each other. Hoagland even had to cover his mouth with both his hands, at the mention of Santa Claus, but he and Charlotte said nothing, humoring the young and innocent.

And after all, there were more presents than ever before. Everyone remembered the two little Greens that first Christmas after Joe died.

Kate and Lizzie trimmed the tree, hanging the silver bugles, the rosy bubbles, while the tears went on rolling down Kate's face, and Lizzie was sniffing and saying she had a cold.

"I guess I'll make me a hot lemonade before I go to bed. You better have one, too, Mis' Green."

"I'll have to get the stepladder, Lizzie; I can't reach to put this star on the top."

"I'll get it." Lizzie ran out into the kitchen and took the opportunity to throw her apron over her head and have a good cry, while Kate put her face down in hands stained by the branches of the little balsam tree. Joe! Joe!

When Lizzie came back they were both firmly cheerful.

"Look at this sugar apple! It started in with the brightest red cheek you ever saw, and it gets paler every year. Jodie can't resist licking it."

"Honest, Mis' Green, didja ever see anything like this doll house? And all the extras, the father and the little carpet sweeper and everything!"

Their faces glowed gently, like two good little girls, as they looked again at the magnificent dolls' house that had come for Charlotte. All the extras, as Lizzie said—the father in full evening dress with waved yellow china hair, the mother in a pink ball gown, the pink-and-white wax cockatoo in a gilt wire cage. And the doll-house food! Ham and eggs, fish with a tiny round of lemon and a touch of paper parsley, sausages, pink pudding with squiggles of chocolate, a little roast chicken.

Master Hoagland Driggs, Jr.'s small calling card was tied to the chimney with holly-red ribbon. Lizzie looked at it, sniffing.

"That one! I'd Master Hoagland Driggs, Junior him, if he was mine!" she said, severely.

"Listen, Lizzie! St. Stephen's chimes! It must be midnight!"

Oh come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant;

("One of those bells is dreadfully cracked.")

Oh, come ye, oh, come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold Him born the King of angels;

("Sounds awful pretty, though, don't it?")

Oh come, let us adore Him,
Oh come, let us adore Him,
Oh come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

"Merry Christmas, Lizzie," Kate said, smiling, with wet eyes.

"M-merry— Oh, dear!"

"Everything's done. Doesn't it look wonderful? I can hardly wait to see the children's faces in the morning!"

Chapter Ten

JODIE was going downtown, running a stick along the fence palings, singing a wordless, tuneless song. Now and then a little wave of happiness broke over him, and he had to give a sudden skip, scattering the downy bright-eyed balls of feathers that were printing the snow with arrowy tracks. He paused to flatten his nose against the window of the Vienna Bakery, a pink tip of tongue coming out of the corner of his mouth as he looked at the glazed stickiness and plump raisins of the cinnamon bun. In the fish-shop window the goldfish drifted and turned in their tank, and a lobster languidly waved a claw from its couch of ice. He turned in at the grocer's for a few friendly words with Mr. Turben, and an olive from a tub of brine, and then went out and on, careful not to step on the cracks of the pavement, followed by old Shep.

The ladies of the Congregational church were having a fair in an unrented store, and Jodie and Shep entered, and wandered through a forest of skirts, paying no attention to voices high in air inquiring who in the world let that dog in. Layer cakes, dressed dolls, sachets—a great many things to look at.

A lilac glove case, perfumed and padded, took Jodie's fancy. He wanted to buy it for his mother.

He loved to bring her surprises—wormy chestnuts, or stones that really did look as if they had gold in them. He indicated the glove case with a small dirty hand, and hoarsely asked how much it was.

"A dollar and a half, darling," Miss Pearl Miller answered, dripping honey, breaking off from her talk with Mr. Royal Clawson of the Men's Bible Class to bend with sweet womanliness to the round uplifted face, and two other ladies behind the counter smiled at Mr. Clawson with their heads on one side, and groaned tenderly.

That was bad news. Jodie's pockets held a good deal, but not that much. A canceled postage stamp, a licorice nigger baby meltingly attached to a grimy handkerchief, some walnut shells, two five-cent pieces, and three pennies. He wandered about for a few minutes, and then went back to inquire again, and, not completely discouraged, again. Mr. Clawson had moved on to the Fish Pond, and the Fancy-table ladies, whose feet were beginning to ache, somewhat lost their womanly tenderness.

"Goodness, Leora, here's that little boy back again, and I've told him forty million times how much the glove case is. Oh, dear! Now, little boy, you *must not touch* the things. And you must take your dog out of here!"

Well, if it was to be, it was to be. Farewell, lilac glove case, beautiful and unattainable. Jodie and

Shep trotted home, through the clicking gate, around the house to the kitchen door.

"Now wipe your feet off, Jodie Green. Don't you dass come tracking snow all over my clean floor!"

Jodie paused for a drink from the sink faucet. The water in the glass changed from cloudy to clear, and he drank it in great gulps punctuated by loud panting sighs, as if he had been in the desert a long time, far from an oasis.

"Where's mother, Lizzie?"

"Run away with a soldier."

The big round box with its little round boxes nested inside—cloves, cinnamon, ginger, allspice, nutmegs, mace—was open on the table, the kitchen smelled warmly spicy. He felt sleepy, coming in from the cold; he put his head on the kitchen table and yawned widely.

"What are we going to have for dessert for supper?"

"Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies."

His mother really was out. He didn't like the house without her, so still, as if it were watching him, as if things were happening behind his back. He climbed into a chair in the parlor window to look for her.

The dusk was deepening, the arc light on the corner lit, but he could see snow beginning to fall again. No one passed by, footprints and wheel tracks were lightly filled and hidden. Behind him familiar things disappeared in a darkness that pressed him against the

glass until the tip of his nose was white. Suppose she never came? His heart lurched. The world was empty except for a watching child.

Then under the arc light he saw her, her long crêpe veil blowing in the snowy wind, hurrying home to him, and the reassurance of her presence poured through all his body.

Kate had been out delivering some score cards she had painted for Mrs. Wells' valentine heart party. She was working hard to make money. The most difficult thing was to tell people she would like to take orders for portraits, dinner cards, anything "hand painted." She would plan an easy, graceful speech, she could hear herself saying it, just the opportunity would come—and time after time she let it slip past.

She would lie awake at night in a panic that made her heart beat fast, drenched her with terror. What if she couldn't get anything more to do? What if she couldn't get along on the little bit of money left from the Thunder Bird? Jodie, who slept in the small room opening out of hers, woke up sometimes to hear his mother crying in the dark, and lay still, not daring to move. Why should grown-up people ever cry? And what can a boy do about it, even a boy who is going to be six his next birthday?

But Kate's terror was always gone in the morning. Mornings when snowy branches were blazing white traceries on the blue; bright blowing mornings tossing red maple buds against the sky; even mornings of mist-

like drifting rain—brought courage and reassurance.

Mrs. Driggs was wonderful, giving such large orders. Just now she was working on a miniature of Mrs. Driggs' mother, old Mrs. Barnes.

"It must be so much easier this way, from a photograph," Carrie Pyne said, looking at the three chins and the flat scalloped curls. "What I mean is—well, you never *could* make a live person keep so still, could you? Kind of hard to make a *dainty* miniature from this, though."

And Mrs. Martine had given big orders, too, and gotten lots of other people to order dinner cards and candle shades and painted satin candy boxes. It made Kate feel hot and grateful and reluctant. She hated painting things for Mrs. Martine, she put her very best work into them; scattered violets on satin sachets, sprays of forget-me-nots tied by bowknots dancing Highland flings. She worked herself into a fever, forcing herself to say, "Mrs. Martine is being very kind."

For hours she painted Dutch girls, Japanese maidens, Colonial ladies, until her shoulder ached and black spots swarmed before her eyes, while the children hung over her, breathed down her neck, ate apples in her ear, admiring every touch of her brush.

They planned secretly to help, to make money, too.

"We'll have a store," Charlotte decided. "On a table in the front yard, under Miss Smith's lilac bush. And I'll paint dinner cards for it."

Charlotte and Jodie each had a Prang non-poisonous water-color box, with blue daisies and a little girl's blue head on the cover. It said non-poisonous, so they sucked their stubby quill-handled brushes as much as they liked, but Charlotte told Hoagland he would die if he sucked his paintbrush. He had a grand paint box, wooden, with drawers and drawers of paints, each cake with a rampant lion on it. But only little specks of color came off; no matter how much water he used, he couldn't make a nice pink or yellow mud.

"So will I paint dinner cards," said Jodie. But Charlotte discouraged him.

"No, Jodie, you always go over the edge. Real artists never go over the edge."

Charlotte never went over the edge. She painted so neatly that she could even do the veins in fairy wings in the Green and Yellow Fairy Books.

"Say, kids, do you know what? We could have lemonade for sale," Hoagland suggested. "I betcha million dollars we could make an awful lot of money selling that. I'll tease Myrtle for some lemons and sugar."

"And, oh, listen! We can get some trailing arbutus to sell!"

"Gee! C'mon! Let's go get it now! I'll get my bike!"

The trailing arbutus grew at the edge of the pine woods behind the haunted house. They went along

Poor Farm Road on their bicycles, Jodie apprehensively riding on Hoagland's handlebars.

"Gee! Here's a lot, under these old dead leaves!"

The stems clung close to the cold ground under the rotting leaves and pine needles. Clusters of small stars, white and frosty pink, with rusty-spotted leaves. So sweet, so sweet!

"*Jos*eph Mont*gom*ery *Green!* Don't pull them up that way! Miss Hazel says you mustn't *ever* pull a wild flower up by its roots!"

"Gee! I hope the old woman in that house don't see us!"

"Why, what would she do?"

"She'd do plenty," said Hoagland, darkly.

"Well, but tell us what, why don't you?"

"Noble says she caught a bad little boy one night and she cooked him!"

"She wouldn't cook a good, quite big boy, would she?" Jodie asked, anxiously.

"Hoagland, you ought to be ashamed, scaring Jodie. Now listen, I tell you what we got to do, kids—we got to wet our handkerchiefs in the brook to keep these fresh."

Which was the pouring of the brook, which the wind in the pine trees? The two sounds flowed together. The water slid smooth as glass over the stones, tiny voices spoke through the waterfall. They soaked their handkerchiefs in the icy stream, scattering a shimmering school of minnows.

No more school! No matter if the arithmetic book was lost, the pencil box, the pencil sharpener that wouldn't sharpen anything. No more school forever.

Then autumn bonfires crackled, familiar things looked strange seen through smoke like flawed glass, and the children tried to eat potatoes baked in the blaze. "Hey, kids, gee! this spud's good!" But even Hoagland couldn't get far with the ash-grimed blistering hot skin and the cold raw inside. Yellow apples, frosty with dew, lay in the dew-drenched grass; bits of grass stuck to them; they made the children's teeth ache with cold. An organ grinder came through Chestnut Street. His monkey's fingers were quick and cold in the children's hands as it took their pennies. And the dark threat could no longer be ignored. School would begin soon—next week—to-morrow morning.

Jodie began lessons in the autumn. Kate taught drawing at the school, to pay for him and Charlotte. She was happy at the breakfast table, scooping tea out of the tea caddy with the red china frog on the lid, making bacon sandwiches for the eleven-o'clock recess. A jug of water and sunlight quivered on the table; holy water, its halo quivered above it on the ceiling. Jodie made mountains and rivers with his oatmeal and milk, and Kate, between bites, heard Charlotte's spelling. Charlotte always knew her spelling, and won a prize for it every year—a passe-partouted

"Baby Stuart," a passe-partouted "Shakespeare's Birthplace."

The children were having dancing lessons, too. Kate painted a miniature of Ethel Anderson, to pay for them, and strained her eyes over a Battenberg lace collar for Charlotte to wear with a made-over black velvet of Lulu's. Jodie bobbed about dreamily, not at all bothered by the music, and Charlotte competently guided her partners through waltz and two-step and polka—*one* two three and a *one* two three! Hoagland went, too, and was having private lessons in the sailor's hornpipe beside. The children would find him, hot, red, despairing, puffing and pounding, when they arrived with their slipper bags, Miss Ethel skipping lightly before him, winding up air rope, touching herself fore and aft as a butterfly touches a rose, but despairing, too, clapping her hands for Miss Edna to stop playing and begin all over again.

There were other gayeties beside the dance. Children had birthdays, and blotted invitations on small sheets of note paper decorated with little boys and girls in color and "Come to my Party" arrived for Charlotte and Jodie, and Mrs. Driggs entertained for Master Driggs with box parties at the Palace—refined vaudeville—followed by ice cream at Goff's, far too often, the other mothers thought. But the children loved everything—the curtain with the lady in pink and the gentleman in pale blue, feeding swans from a boat that trailed a yellow silk parlor curtain in the

water, the performing dogs barking on their semicircle of stools, the lady in white tights and spangles who ran forward, holding out her hands for the applause they so earnestly gave her, the sad gentleman with the big mustache who stood beside the colored pictures on the screen, singing:

"Naow th' *moon* don't shine so *bright*,
For I'm *all* alone to-*night* ——"

The Irish comedian, the Hebrew comedian, the tramp comedian with his scarlet nose, getting off their jokes, while the white magic of the children's laughter made cheap and vulgar things funny and lovely.

Winter, with snowdrifts and crystal trees, and Christmas coming. Jodie waited outside of shops in the cold, hoping that people would engage him to carry bundles so that he could earn enough to buy his mother the toilet set on a turbulent sea of blue satin in Small's window. Snuffling, joggling from one cold cast-iron foot to the other, he would look up at the shoppers hopefully, but he was too shy to ask anyone in a voice loud enough to be heard, so he had to give her a calendar painted with a sprig of mud-colored holly, just as he had last Christmas.

Then spring again. Easter. Kate sat up late at night painting faces on Easter eggs for the children, dressing an egg in a crocus cap, or a clown's ruff, or a baby's frilled bonnet. Hoagland brought them large

chocolate eggs with doves and Easter greetings and encircling squiggles done in white icing.

"They cost one fifty apiece at Goff's; they got cocoanut inside, and they're the biggest that comes! Lessee your eggs. Y'oughta c'mon over and see mine; I got forty-three. I bet I got the biggest egg in the whole world, full of jelly beans!"

Jodie hunted for the Easter rabbit's nests, his cheeks, even his large transparent ears, flaming with excitement. Blown eggs, light as bubbles, dyed blue and red and yellow, behind the playroom sofa; under the dining-room table an egg of sparkling sugar that held in its heart a small bright scene of children and forget-me-nots—in the doll-house chimney a tiny nest with one white chocolate-spotted egg. Kind Easter rabbit, hopping about through the dark on paws softer than velvet, laying your eggs for Jodie!

Hoagland ate as many chocolate eggs as he could, pensively, as the day went on, and later was sick. Charlotte saved hers. She always had bits of Christmas candy cane to suck in April, bits of fondant Easter egg to nibble in July.

On Easter afternoon all the children went to St. Stephen's. Charlotte's short hair was topped with a frilled pink organdy hat, just made by Kate. It sat high and airy, held on by an elastic under her chin. All the other girls had Easter hats, too, organdy, or leghorn wreathed with muslin buttercups. Even Jodie had an Easter hat, straw, with blue ribbons like a

sailor. Opal Mendoza, all forget-me-nots and pale blue ruffles, was behaving like a little saint, kneeling, with big blue eyes meltingly cast toward heaven, remembering to smooth out her skirt when she sat down, singing sweetly, shrilly, with the other children:

"Jesus lives! thy terrors now
Can no longer, death, appall us:"

As sweetly and shrilly as she had sung all the way to church: "*I* have lace on my pan-*ties! I* have lace on my pan-*ties!*"

"Jesus lives! by this we know
Thou, O grave, canst not enthrall us.
Alleluia!"

The children sang, balancing on hassocks, thinking of the plants in the chancel that they would be allowed to choose from and take home. Charlotte always chose her plants so wisely, safe dependable geraniums that grew bigger and bigger, and that she could take back year after year at Easter to help trim the chancel. But Jodie, in spite of all the good advice Kate and Charlotte gave him, would choose heliotrope that died in a week or so under his passionate sniffing.

Chapter Eleven

"CHARLOTTE, I'm just going to slip over to Aunt Sarah's for a minute. If the grocer comes before I get back, will you put it in the ice box? What time are you going to Gladys's?"

"Half past six, Aunt Kate. Can I do anything for you before I go?"

"Well, if I'm not home by six—I *will* be, but just if I should possibly happen not to be—you might put a couple of potatoes in to bake."

"Yes, Aunt Kate."

Why didn't she say something about the armful of pear blossoms that Kate had forced in the sunny window? Well, if she doesn't want to mention them, she needn't. I'm sure it makes no difference to me ——

"Aren't these lovely, Charlotte? I thought I'd take them over to cheer Aunt Sarah up, poor old thing."

"Yes, indeed, they're very pretty."

Very pretty! Well, Charlotte never had been an enthusiastic girl. But she had lots of splendid qualities—so sensible and dependable. She would remember those potatoes. Kate paused at the bottom of the stairs.

"*Char*-lut!"

"Yes, Aunt Kate?"

"Better put in three potatoes; Joe can always eat two."

Charlotte was in the studio, firm as lichen on a rock, with most of Kate's studies piled up behind a green denim curtain—"You're *sure* you don't mind, Aunt Kate?"—and their places taken by passe-partouted Gibson pictures: "Is a Caddy Always Necessary?" "The Eternal Question," and the rest, class photographs, and the big Princeton pennant Hoagland Driggs had given her. Lulu had died nine years ago, leaving her few thousand dollars to Charlotte, and Charlotte to Kate.

Well, Charlotte had turned into a splendid woman with no nonsense about her, Kate thought, walking along through fine spring rain that made her cheeks glow, made the pear blossoms shine. There never had been any nonsense about her, thought Kate, remembering the Charlotte who practiced conscientiously to the wagging metronome, the Charlotte whose reports were always marked Excellent, the Charlotte she couldn't make fluffy and vivacious, like the rest of the girls. She thought of the way the others had gone on when they were sixteen or seventeen, Dotty and Gladys and Mary Katherine and Marjorie, with their pompadours and their flowered dimities and their shirred satin girdles: "Oh, my dear—oh, how ghastly, I called this *man* my dear! I simply shriek my *head* off at a football game, I get so ex*cited*, my dear; I haven't any voice *left;* I'm simply *crazy*; I just grab

the person in front of me even if it's an *ut*ter stranger, I know everyone thinks I'm *crazy* ——!" And the mildest remark had been answered by, "Oh, I think that's so *aw*f'ly true!" or, "How *simp*ly wonderful!" or, "Oh *nnnnno!*" They were all so animated, and Charlotte was so heavy—good and polite and heavy, heaviest of all when she tried to talk like the other girls. Kate had been sorry for her and exasperated by her. She tried hard to make Charlotte's little parties gay, and they remained proper and polite, sedate —solemn, really. And fluffy clothes on Charlotte were all wrong, with her thick waist, and smooth heavy hair that wouldn't "pomp."

She was better-looking now since she had taken off her glasses. She had a complexion of apples and snow, and people often spoke of her pleasant expression. A respectable number of people always danced with her, but no one ever asked for the encores or the extras. She would dance encore after encore with the same man, applauding heartily at the end of each dance, more heartily than her partner. She was apt to have the supper dance with one of the girls' fathers, or with some "pill" like J. Hartley Harrison. Kate suffered for her, suffered far more than Charlotte.

Never any nonsense about Charlotte. But Kate hadn't known about Charlotte's "crush" on Lilian Simpson, when she went to church just to see her, to try to copy the way she stood, bust out, stomach in, her finger tips on the pew in front, fingers pressed back,

wrists arching. Lilian had been the belle of Westlake. A jutting ledge of hat sprang out from over her pompadour; her shirtwaist was dragged down in a kangaroo pouch to a deep point; her high-boned collar foamed at the top with puckered Valenciennes lace. Charlotte, gazing at her, hated her own old traveler's ruching, and longed for a straight-front corset instead of a Ferris waist. She was a scarlet mass of joy when Lilian said, "Hello, Charlotte"; she wore an artificial violet, dropped from Lilian's muff, in a small muslin bag hung around her neck, and kissed it good night every night.

After that she "had a case on" Herbert Watts. She knew him only by sight, a pretty youth of sixteen, with curly black hair, who carried the processional cross at St. Stephen's, and took up the collection in Sunday school. Dotty Jackson and Gladys Blunt knew all about it, and always put his name into apples, when seeds were to be counted, or wrote it on slips to dream on with wedding cake. And often they accompanied her on her shaken pilgrimages past the Watts' small pale-pink house, on the other side of the railroad tracks, where the sacred flame of the Watts' parlor stove could be seen between draped lace curtains. Charlotte dreamed of being run over outside that house, and being carried in to die, while Herbert knelt beside her. Or perhaps spending years of inspirational invalidism on the Watts' sofa—a new and beautiful

Charlotte, large-eyed through suffering, golden-haired through a miracle, the light of Herbert's life.

But her two passions had gotten her into the habit of going to all the services at St. Stephen's, and now Mrs. Partridge said they couldn't get along without her on the Altar Guild and in the Sunday school.

Kate turned the corner of West Street, and went up the path. She could hear scuttling inside, and whispering, after she rang the bell, and then the door was opened by messy Norah Nolan, with stove polish on her cheek, a whitish apron over her gingham one, and her sleeves rolled up.

"Howda do, Norah! Are the ladies— Oh, there you are, Carrie!"

Carrie emerged from a bulge of portière like a moth from a cocoon, and Kate laid her rain-glowing cheek against the ash-soft one.

"Kate Green! This rainy day! Well, if you aren't the greatest girl! Here, let me help you take off your rubbers. Kate! What mar*vel*ious cherry blossoms! Where *did* you get them?"

"They're pear blossoms, Carrie. I simply forced them in a sunny window, I thought Aunt Sarah might like them."

"A sunny window! Well, I suppose it's easy to have ideas if you can only think of them. Oh, Norah ——"

Norah would never have heard that faint cry if

she hadn't stopped to listen at the dining-room door instead of going back to the kitchen.

"Oh, you might just put these in the pail, please, and I'll fix them when Mrs.— Kate, she's terrible, worse than the last one. We had an omelet for lunch that was just the color of a stove lid and about as tough. I'm nearly distracted. I said to Mrs. Whipple I just wished we could get into some nice boarding house, and, Kate Green, what do you think she said to me?"

"What?"

"Really, it's so awful, I don't believe I ought to repeat it. Well, you know her ears are as sharp as— as anything, but she pretended not to understand, and she said, 'Well, Carrie, that's a pretty suggestion, taking up our abode in a bawdy house! But I'm afraid we'd find some difficulty in being taken in!' I*mag*ine saying such a thing at her age! Eighty-one years old! I was so embarrassed I nearly died!"

"Goodness! Where is she?"

"I think she's taking a nap. Don't look at the room. It's a sight, and I knocked over the card table when you rang the bell. I was trying to do a new solitaire Violetta Mortimer taught me. It's called Idiot's Delight, but I can't make it come out. Oh, Kate! I do feel so badly! Evangeline Mortimer wants to give me the darlingest Angora kitten; its fur is so thick that when it walks it shakes all over, and I do want it terribly ——"

Her face glowed with the wonder of the kitten, its pink triangle of mouth opening in a soundless mew, the vibration of its purring.

"And of course I can't have it, because Benjie would simply kill it. A cook we had at Cedarmere had the darlingest little gray kitten once, with a little white shirt front, and Benjie got it—I couldn't sleep for nights! And Mrs. Whipple *won't* chain him or put him in a cage. She cares a million times more for that parrot than she does for me, or anyone, and I want that little kitten so terribly. It seems to me if I only had something of my own, I wouldn't feel so blue and lonely ——"

I'd better stop at the Vienna Bakery on the way home, Kate thought, and get some rolls. Mercy! How this room does look, with cards all over the floor and every picture crooked. They say that shows they've been dusted. Maybe! Leaf-green Benjie was the only bright thing in the room, curling his claw around his bill and twisting his head on one side to look at her from a round eye of black and amber glass —nasty cruel thing! Poor Carrie! She didn't have much fun. But trust an old maid to want a cat! Every time!

"Kate, whatever in the world happened yesterday at the Wednesday Club? You went off so quickly after tea I didn't get a chance to ask you. I thought you were going to give your talk on art. I told everyone ——"

"Well, my dear, I was very much relieved not to; in fact, I was overjoyed, but it certainly makes me *laugh!* First place, Mrs. Roberts said to me, 'Oh, Mrs. Green, I want you to give us a little talk on art at the next meeting ——' "

"I know; you told me ——"

"And I said, I simply *could*n't ——"

"You could, too, Kate, you could do it marvelously, very well indeed."

"I said I'd never done such a thing in my life, I'd be scared to death, but Mrs. Roberts said she wouldn't take no for an answer. Well, and so I just mentioned it to one or two people, and they *all* said Mrs. Roberts never took no for an answer, and I'd better be ready, and Mrs. Jackson told me that after they came home from their trip to Italy, Mrs. Roberts asked her to give a talk on 'My Rambles in Rome,' and Mrs. Jackson said she *couldn't;* but Mrs. Roberts called on her just the same, and Mrs. Jackson said she thought she was going to faint, and she was abso*lute*ly unprepared, but she had to do it. You remember that time, Carrie?"

"I guess no one has much of a chance to forget anything connected with the Jacksons' trip to Italy; the poor things have certainly talked enough about it," said Carrie, pitying in order not to envy.

"So, my dear, I saw her on Monday in Small's, and she said she knew I really wouldn't mind just saying a few words, just simply and naturally as I would

to a few friends in conversation, about art from an artist's point of view, and of course I said I simply couldn't; and she said nonsense, she never took no for an answer. So then I got to thinking, and I thought maybe I ought to on account of art having meant so much to me always—you know, I'm funny that way—so if she had called on me I was going to say a few words; but, mercy! I *certainly* didn't want to, and I was very much relieved, it was exactly what I wanted, only, as I say, it makes me laugh ——"

No need to tell Carrie that she had fixed up her blue-and-white foulard, just in case, and bought new white gloves, and couldn't sleep, and practiced on Joe—she *couldn't* give her talk in front of Charlotte, but Joe thought she was grand. And she had bought some Perry pictures, just to illustrate. She left them hidden by her coat in Mrs. Baylow's hall. There were always two talks, and first the pretty Miss Anderson—so called not because she was pretty for a person, but because she was pretty for an Anderson—gave hers on "The Feminine Invasion of the Field of Literature," while Kate couldn't hear a word because the blood was pounding in her ears and her heart was lurching and her stomach feeling queer, and she was saying over and over to herself, "Some one has said that Art is the embodiment of beautiful thought in visible form"—and *then* Mrs. Roberts said: "Now we are going to have a great treat—Mrs. Skilling is going to

share with us the pleasures of a visit to Mount Vernon."

A visit to Mount Vernon! Not that Kate *cared*—in fact, she was very much relieved—overjoyed! So she assured Joe and Carrie, over and over again. Only it made her *laugh!* And Mrs. Roberts saying casually while they were having tea, "I was so sorry you didn't feel you could talk to us, Mrs. Green. Maybe some other time." And she had told heaps of people that she was afraid she wasn't going to be able to get out of it, and they all wanted to know what had happened, and thought it was so *queer!*

Carrie thought it was queer. She thought Mrs. Roberts had acted outrageously.

"Of course, Carrie, you know I was delighted, only, as I said, it makes me laugh."

"Why didn't you tell her you were dying to talk?" said Aunt Sarah, suddenly speaking up, hidden in an armchair with its back to them, making the ladies jump and search their memories, while Carrie cried:

"Mercy! Were you there all the time, Lady Whipple?"

What a way for Aunt Sarah to behave, Kate thought, walking home with a light step. Poor Carrie! Poor Aunt Sarah, too! Infuriating Aunt Sarah, of course, hiding away in her armchair and letting them talk. Thank goodness, Carrie had hardly let Kate get a word in edgewise! But it can't be much fun to be old, with your friends all gone

just when you need them for help and courage. Who cared, really, how Aunt Sarah was feeling? People were kind and bright, telling her in lilting voices how young she looked; they took devoted care of her when she was ill, but who really cared? Who could understand?

The moment of true vision passed. "Of course we *all* care!" Kate reassured herself, planning to take Aunt Sarah a jar of her brandied peaches to-morrow. No, not to-morrow; she had promised to help Charlotte with her blue serge to-morrow; but some day very soon.

The rain had stopped. The air smelled of it, and of the manure spread on sopping lawns. The bare branches of the trees came pouring, streaming down against a wet flowing sky, but with a lovely upward lift at their very tips. Enchanting sky—who else in Westlake ever looks at it? She walked along, complacent yet adoring, feeling that expectant happiness that flowed into her like a tide sometimes, the feeling of something wonderful coming soon, just a little way ahead. Painting, sewing, cooking, working in the garden, didn't leave her much time to think about the future, but believing in it took no separate time; it colored all her life as the sky is colored pink before the sun rises. Something wonderful is going to happen—what? Oh, what are you saying, what are you trying to tell me, beautiful voice speaking so far away?

Mrs. Joe Green in her rubbers and her rain coat. Sometimes she didn't feel at all the Mrs. Green who has homemade raspberry jam and the biggest dahlias in Westlake, who has brought up those two children so wonderfully and gotten along on so little. "Good evening, Mr. Bascom! No, I don't believe it's really cleared up yet. Bad weather for colds—yes, indeed!" Mr. Bascom would be astonished if he knew that at this minute she was thinking of living in Paris, in the Latin Quarter—the *Quartier Latin sur le—la?—le Rive Gauche.* Painting in an attic studio among gray roofs, having *café* at round green tables on which chestnut blossoms fell. She longed to travel. She used to pore over the maps in the children's geographies, and she took so many travel books out of the library Miss Fish got quite interested. Some day, some day, she would go, she and Joe, when Charlotte was married—perhaps she'd better say if—still, Hartley Harrison was very attentive.

"Good evening, Mr. Hoare." I'm not what you think I am, Mr. Hoare, I'm not what anybody in Westlake thinks I am. But there's no way of showing except by painting—really serious painting. I believe I could do it that way. Autumn after next, when Joe goes to college, I'll have more time and space, and get back to it in earnest ——

A crescent moon in the sky reminded her to go in to the Vienna Bakery for crescent rolls, and there was Mrs. Driggs, with something like a pongee sponge bag

on her head, goggles, long dust-colored veil, and pongee duster, buying cream puffs.

"Hop into the auto and I'll ride you home."

So Kate, pleased and self-conscious and hoping people would see her, climbed in through the door in the middle of the back of the Driggs' automobile, and Mrs. Driggs heaved and squeezed after her.

"When do you expect Hoagland for his spring vacation?" Kate asked, clutching her hat, bowing involuntarily now and then as Noble drove them jerkily home. For Hoagland was a grown-up young man, in his last year at Princeton, coming back for the holidays bland and fat, wearing matching ties and socks, and boutonnières that were almost corsage bouquets. He made Kate feel five years old when he replied to her observations with his tolerant, "*I* see." A steady young man, very different from the sixteen-year-old Hoagland who had to be sent away to boarding school because of his infatuation for Opal Mendoza. The Driggses had had an awful time with him then. Mr. Driggs had nearly had a stroke, he was so angry, and Mrs. Driggs went around with her face all puffed up and her eyes nearly shut from crying, and the Greens no longer heard "Tell Me, Pretty Maiden" and "The Rosary" from the Driggs' pianola across the street. Kate used to say they would drive her crazy, but she missed them when they stopped. And Opal, with blue stuff smeared on her eyelids, although she was only sixteen, and cheap perfume, strong enough to

knock you down, just laughed, and went walking at night in the graveyard with other boys. But now that affair seemed all blown over.

"Thank you ever so much, Mrs. Driggs. Just let me hop out at your gate."

"All right, if you'd just as soon; it's kind of hard for Noble to turn round. Good night!"

"Good night!"

The house was dark, not glowing to meet her, as it used to be in Lizzie's time. Lizzie had married. Kate had hardly been able to persuade her that she must, with Dan Healey waiting for her ten years and getting a good new job in Syracuse. Now Kate sometimes had Effa Ashburn in to help, and sometimes no one. Effa wasn't worth much—too young and so fat and lazy. But you couldn't get a good girl for what Kate could pay, any more.

She switched on the hall ceiling light in its strawberries-and-cream glass globe. She could smell potatoes baking. She called up the stairs:

"Joe-ho!"

"Hello!"

"Are you home?"

"Yeh!"

Her Joe! Heart of her heart! So beautiful to her in spite of the steel-rimmed spectacles that covered his clear blue eyes, his stick-out ears that shone like rosy shells when he stood in front of a strong light, his cowlick, his large dusty shoes, his unpressed suit—why

was one trousers leg always caught up? So sensitive, so dreamy. And so artistic, Kate thought, watching him trying to make scenery for the old toy theater with its "Cinderella's Kitchen" and "Ballroom in the Palace," rummaging in Kate's piece box at the top of the stairs that held patterns and rolls of tan pongee, dimity with forget-me-nots on it, and kitchen-apron gingham, covering an electric bulb with violet or green crêpe paper, giving everything up in despair, and then starting in again.

She had gone through so much with him: when he fell through the ice and nearly drowned, skating on the lake; when the boys were on the barn roof and Laddie Baylow said, "Jump, why don't you?" and Jodie jumped; when he burned his eyebrows off after he had gotten enough subscriptions to *The Youth's Companion* to win *Fun with Chemistry.* His body had grown hard from roaming in the woods, swimming, fighting, and playing with the other boys, but the inside Joe seemed more tender, more helpless, more easily hurt, than when he was a baby or little Jodie. Kate was in despair sometimes. From loud laughter, tearing spirits, his eyes would suddenly fill with tears. What was it? *What* had she said or done?

But one thing about him she did know, that he had no nonsense in his head about girls, never thought of them. She boasted of it to the other mothers, rather meanly sometimes.

Up in his room Joe sat reading passionate poems,

his legs wound about each other, thrilling, biting great chunks of apple. When he was with other people he was shy and unhappy, anxiously trying with nervous laughter to fit in. But here, alone, he was happy and reassured.

Jimmy Roberts had recommended Swinburne as hot stuff, but Joe forgot he was looking for that as he read:

> *Who hath remembered me? Who hath forgotten?*
> Thou hast forgotten, O summer swallow,
> But the world shall end when I forget.

Already the age-old cry, "Remember me!" was part of a language he dimly understood. "I will never forget you!" he said out loud, but cautiously, while he gazed starry-eyed, blindly, at the picture of Sir Galahad Kate had hung over his bed for his inspiration, the picture that had been invisible to him for years. Then he added, experimentally, "I have never forgotten you, my darling ——"

"Joe-ho! Oh, Joe!"

"Yessum!"

"We aren't going to have anything for supper, because Charlotte's out, and I thought it would be fun just to have a sort of picnic on the card table in front of the fire—what?"

"I didn't say anything!"

"So would you rather have scrambled eggs, or shall I just open a can of baked beans?"

"Baked beans!"

"If you'd rather have the eggs just say so, because they aren't any trouble."

"No, I wouldn't."

"All right, then, it's beans?"

"Beans!"

India's Love Lyrics. Jimmy had lent him those.

> There is an hour at twilight too heavy with memory.
> There is a flower that I fear——

Here was another. "Less than the dust ——" That was what J. Hartley Harrison was always singing, going up on his toes like a ballet dancer, with his eyeglasses shining and the veins standing out on his forehead. Joe couldn't read it without seeing him. But this one was different:

> They are together: Why are we
> So hopelessly, so far apart?
> Oh, I implore you, come to me!
> Come, Consolation of my heart!

"*Sup*per, Joe!" cried Kate, beating upon the Chinese gong.

For a moment he flung himself down beside his chair. He pressed his face against his folded arms; his heart ached with vague happy pain. Then he ran downstairs, falling over his feet, to baked beans and crescent rolls and the potatoes Charlotte had remembered.

Chapter Twelve

"WHY, mother! I'm surprised at you!"

"*Hoh!* Oh, *Joe!* Goodness! You nearly made me jump over the banisters! Feel my heart!"

"Aren't you ashamed, hanging over the stairs listening to J. Hartley Harrison!"

"Ssh! They'll hear you. *Cer*tainly I'm not listening! I hope I have better things to do than listen to Hartley *Harris*on talk about himself! I'm just trying to find out if there's any chance of his going, so I can get the table set for supper."

"He's waiting to be asked."

"Goodness! Don't I know it! Why can't he go home to his little mother with her great big brain? That's what he's always telling me, that his little mother is the one woman he knows that he can have an intellectually satisfying conversation with—Mrs. *Harris*on! *Hmp!* Joe, he's here the whole enduring time. You don't think Charlotte and he could possibly ——?"

"Gosh, no! Charlotte's dippy about Hoagland."

"Non-*sense!*" Kate whispered, piercingly.

"Well, I think so."

"Perfectly ab*surd!*"

"He's here all the time."

"Well, mercy! He always has been, ever since you were children."

"I notice a big difference since I've been home this time."

"Well, all I can say is you certainly have a strong imagination. I'm going to try to slip down without his seeing me ——"

She crept slowly downstairs, pausing on creaking steps, rolling agonized eyes up toward Joe's encouraging grimaces, wrinkling her nose at J. Hartley Harrison's overshoes demurely side by side, and leaning over the banisters to examine the music peeping out from under his nice muffler and his nice gloves. "Songs!" she mouthed to Joe, making a face, pointing to "Would God I were a Tender Apple Blossom," and Joe mouthed back, "Going to spend the evening!"

She tried to pour herself quickly around the edge of the door at the foot of the stairs, but Hartley caught sight of her, and leaped forward to draw her in.

"Ontray, ontray, My Lady Green. Don't be shy! Well, how's my best girl?"

Whose house is this, anyway? thought Kate, and said, coldly:

"'Do, Hartley. Well, Charlotte dear, was it a nice service?"

"A lovely service, Mrs. Green—pardon me, Charlotte—a lovely, lovely service. My very good friend Mr. Broome of the Church of the Transfiguration in Beaumont preached, we were brought together in

our Scout-master work, you know that's one of my pet enthusiasms, Mrs. Green, I think I'm prouder of being a Scout-master than anything else in the world except being the son of my little mother, God bless her. Mr. Broome didn't know I lived here, and I wish you could have seen the sweet way his face lighted up when he caught sight of me as we were leaving the church—I said to him, Mr. Broome, I hope you're going to be in Westlake for some little length of time, I'd like you to meet my mother and my grandmother, eighty-three years young last August, bless her heart. Mother and grandma didn't get to Vespers; the snow was too deep for them; the same reason that kept you at home, Mrs. Green, I presume. We have to take care of ourselves as we get older, I fully realize that. But he said unfortunately he was leaving almost at once. I'd be very glad to introduce you to him at some more favorable opportunity, Mrs. Green; he is one of the sweetest, cleanest fellows, a real inspiration to us all—and what is more, a man, my son. Kipling. I remember his coming up to me at Beaumont after I'd had the privilege of leading a little sing we had, and taking my hand in his, and the dear fellow was so touched he couldn't say a word, just stood there looking at me with the tears in his eyes, it make me kind of choke up myself ——"

"Well, that's very—oh, the telephone! Excuse me, Hartley ——"

"Pardon me, Mrs. Green, I hear your son answer-

ing, and it seems to be for him. I was telling you about this meeting at Beaumont—this will interest you, too, Charlotte ——"

Oh, go home, go *home*, Kate thought, looking despairingly at his neat waves of hair, the tie puffling under a large scarf pin ("It was the dear dad's, Mrs. Green, one of the finest cat's-eyes I've ever seen ——") his thumb and finger pinching his pince-nez as he looked in his pocketbook for an inspirational clipping. You might just as well go, for I won't ask you to supper, Joe's last night before he goes back to college—the idea! Go on home to your little mother, God bless her, and God help her, too! Half past six —mercy! I don't care—chicken salad will keep. Why don't I just get up and go out?

"Pardon me, Mrs. Green—one minute! You'll enjoy this. When I was getting ready to leave for Vespers I saw mother and grandma with their heads together in a corner, and I said to them, what are you two girls up to now, and grandma said ——"

I'll have to ask him, and it will just spoil Joe's last evening. Oh, Joe darling, why are holidays over so quickly? How can I stand having you go? I must try to make him run over to the Mortimer girls' just for a minute to say good-by; he won't want to, but it means so much to them . . . did I water the plants to-day? I'll wait five minutes longer, and then I'll have to go out and make the coffee.

"Pardon me, Charlotte, but Hoagland Driggs is not what I would call a gentleman."

"I'd like to know why not!"

"I have good and sufficient reason for my statement."

"Well, what?"

"Things I wouldn't care to mention before women."

"I think it's the limit to say such things and then not prove them."

"You probably don't recall that he had to be sent away from home in disgrace ——"

"He was simply sent away to boarding school, and, anyway, that was *ages* ago, when he was just a child!"

"The child is father to the man. I think Mrs. Green will bear me out in that statement."

"Hoagland Driggs ——"

"Pardon me, Charlotte, the dad always used to say there were three rules by which you could tell a gentleman—number one ——"

Was this Charlotte, this burning blush, this torrent of indignant words pouring over Hartley as he hopped on one leg in the hall, putting on an overshoe, trying to get in calming remarks—"One moment, Charlotte—" "Pardon me, Charlotte, a woman isn't capable ——"

"I do believe you're right! I do believe Charlotte's in love with Hoagland!" Kate said, awed, to Joe, as she washed the supper dishes and he sat smoking on the kitchen table. Her wonderful perceptive son!

"Oh, Joe darling! To-morrow's so soon!" Her eyes filled; she pulled in her lips and bit down on them.

"Sure I'm right," Joe answered, embarrassed and brisk at the sight of her tears. "He's in there now talking away; they never even saw me when I went in for cigarettes. I betcha anything those two will be engaged before I come home again."

"Oh, Joe! If Charlotte was married, *think* of the things we could do! Go a*broad* ——!"

It seemed too good to come true. But Charlotte and Hoagland did get engaged. They were to be married in June, just after Joe's graduation. "Of course I'll miss her *ter*ribly," Kate told her friends. "But he certainly has turned out to be a splendid steady young man, and they're wonderfully suited to each other." She only hoped she didn't show how surprised she was that Charlotte should be engaged at all. And although Mr. and Mrs. Driggs weren't *quite* —well—Hoagland was asked everywhere, and while one mustn't think of money in connection with marriage ——

Charlotte, placid and pleased, embroidered monograms, went shopping, tried on dresses. Dorothy Jackson gave a linen shower for her, Gladys Blunt a kitchen shower, with white satin ribbons tied to egg beaters and lace-edged bouquets stuck into tin funnels. There were luncheons with Kewpie dolls dressed as brides, sticking out their stomachs among roses and asparagus fern—"Now—my—dear! Did you ever *see* anything so cunning? Now I *ask* you!" The girls

looked at her ring. "*Char*lotte! My *dear!* Well, of course, it's *per*fectly adorable!" They envied her because she was going abroad on her wedding trip. Through all the excitement Charlotte was calm, cheerful, capable.

The day before the wedding. Through the screened windows came soft fragrant heat and the sound of the lawn mower Noble had brought over to cut the Greens' lawn. Kate ran up and down stairs with flaming spots in her cheeks, told Carrie Pyne she thought her feet were going to drop off, went to the kitchen on errands she forgot on the way, shouted upstairs to Joe, and then shouted: "Never mind! Nothing!" The doorbell rang; the telephone rang; Hatty Butterfield was in the library with Charlotte, writing down "wh. satin, lace veil l. by Mrs. Elisha Whipple old fam. heirloom—b-maids bs pink roses (find kind) & delphinium relieved with larkspur—" Through it all Charlotte was serene.

But when Kate went to say good night, she found Charlotte face down on her bed, crying desperately.

"Why, Charlotte, darling! There, there ——"

"Oh-o-oh, Aunt *Kate* ——!"

"There, there, there ——"

The room was bright with moonlight that silvered Charlotte's open trunk, her bags, the dolls' house Hoagland had given her long ago, her wet pillow. Her sobs died; she lay quiet under Kate's stroking hand.

"What's the matter, darling?"

"Nothing—I guess I was tired. I'm all right now." She sat up, sniffed, blew her nose vigorously.

"You know it's not too late—if you have any misgivings," Kate suggested, timidly.

"It's no use having misgivings with the silver all marked and everything," Charlotte said, beginning to brush her hair. "I think I'll have a bath if there's enough hot water." She dismissed Kate kindly. And on her wedding day she was herself again.

Clark has done the church very nicely, Kate thought, going up the aisle on Joe's arm. Too much asparagus fern, but those tall baskets of roses at the ends of the pews were impressive. She would have had flowers from the garden, but the decorations were a present from Mr. and Mrs. Driggs. Aunt Sarah was in the front pew, tiny, erect, and disapproving. Tom Green's daughter marrying a *nouveau riche* nobody! Carrie was crying already; her ostrich feather tickled Kate every time she bent close to whisper. Kate leaned forward, shading her eyes with her white-gloved hands, stealing a downward glance at her kangaroo's child of orchids and maidenhair fern, gift of the groom, far too excited to pray.

The wedding was blotted out for her by Joe's tie, that had slipped up in the back.

Coming down the aisle now, Charlotte firm and composed in white satin, smiling pleasantly, but not too much, because they were still in church. Hoag-

land was the picture of dignity. Gray trousers, black cutaway, gardenia, stately scarlet face.

He gave his weeping mother a little bow—Mr. and Mrs. Baylow beaming at him—keep in step—"Gee *whiz*, I'm glad I'm *free*, no *we*-hedding *be*-bells for *me*-he!"

Opal Mendoza in a pew by the door. No one had asked her; she had just come to the wedding, and sat smiling at him from under her broad hat with its long *suivez-moi, jeune homme* streamers, the blue of her eyes. He stalked past her with Charlotte's hand through his arm, his eyes straight ahead, but he saw her smile—promising, mocking—sweet ——

And then they were at 29 Chestnut Street. Charlotte was remembering just what everyone had sent them: "Oh, Mrs. Roberts, that *beau*tiful bridge lamp! And the parchment shade will go with anything." "That *quaint* little door stopper, Mrs. Partridge! It just goes with the chintz I've picked out for my guest room—" "That *ex*quisite etching—" Mrs. Driggs was getting off her little joke about the wedding presents, over and over: "It's a pity no one gave them anything!" Vanilla ice-cream slippers and cupids and hearts skated about the plates under the chipping spoons. Charlotte came running downstairs in her new gray cape suit and Alice-blue hat, and through a patter of rice Mr. and Mrs. Hoagland Driggs, Jr., started on their honeymoon.

Then they were back again, before Kate had fin-

ished saying, "Yes-in-deed we *do* miss her!" Before she had gotten used to the holiday feeling of having no one say, "Pull down your hat in front, Aunt Kate," or, "Oh, Aunt Kate, you've sat on your coat!" Before she had time to do any of the wonderful care-free things she had planned. She had meant to get seriously to work at her painting, now Charlotte was out of the studio and Joe helping with expenses so that she was able to have Effa Ashburn come in every day, instead of now and then. But Joe's old room was so tiny, just about big enough for the sewing machine and the cutting table, and she loved letting him have the studio for his own, to make his models of stage scenery. She thought his stage sets were perfect. The drawing-room scene for "The Wild Duck," with its marbled fireplace and looped-back scraps of brocade curtains, and pyramid bouquets, so quaintly pompous that it made her laugh; the ice-blues and water-greens of the Undine sets that made her feel lonely, she didn't know why. She watched him working in the evenings, fascinated. Making peach trees of wire, dipping the branches in glue, then rolling them in pink-dyed wheat flakes, cutting yew trees from green-dyed sponge, running glass beads on wires to make a fountain's spray. Who but her clever Joe would think of doing things like that?

She urged him to take his models to New York and show them to theatrical producers. But the idea paralyzed Joe. "They're not good enough yet," he

told her. "Some day, when I have more time, maybe I really can do something."

At present he was in the vacuum-cleaner factory, dreamy, impractical, working hard. But some day ——

Charlotte and Hoagland brought home large albums of Hoagland's neatly pasted snapshots, each labeled clearly in white ink—"Sunshine and shadow in Old Carcassonne," "Young Citizens of Old Hyères," or "Old Inn at Clovelly; Excellent Pork Pie." Hoagland had carried a heavy elaborate camera wherever they went, and used it seriously, often asking Charlotte to step to one side so as not to spoil the pictures. It was so easy to spoil a picture. He still thought with regret of that study of old house walls, curving cobbled street, and fig trees that had been spoiled by a pair of drawers hung to dry from a window that came bang in the middle of the composition.

Kate looked at snapshots and snapshots and snapshots, setting a trembling jaw against yawns, her eyes filling with tears. The big leaves turned slowly, slowly. "We wanted to share our good times with the rest of you," Charlotte explained, brightly.

"Here's a rather nice snap of a thatched cottage near Watersmeet."

"Oh, I thought that one was in Lynmouth, dear."

"No, this was Watersmeet. Don't you remember the day we went to that little place for tea?"

"Oh, the day you had too much clotted cream?

Oh, *that* was at the Lorna Doone Farm, Hoagland. Don't you remember? That English family was there, too, and she was so snippy and the hen jumped right up on the table—the same day you snapped the church ——"

"No, I don't mean that day, I mean the other one ——"

"Oh, the other one! Oh! Well, maybe, but I thought *this*— Well, it doesn't matter—still, I'm *sure*— Oh, here's Anne Hathaway's cottage, Aunt Kate! That one didn't come out very well; it was such a dark day. Who is that by the gate, dear?"

"Hmm. Let's see. Isn't that that Miss Prendergast?"

"What Miss Prendergast? Oh, *you* mean Miss Spottiswood. Maybe it is; it's so black I can't make it out ——"

"Here's one that will appeal to Aunt Kate's artistic eye, Charlotte."

"Let's see, dear—which? Oh *yes!* Look, Aunt Kate! Two little peasant children leaving a bunch of wild flowers at a wayside shrine. Will you ever forget the time you had making them pose naturally, Hoagland? They were just as stiff as pokers, but Hoagland just kept at them ——"

"Aunt Kate certainly did enjoy the pictures, dear," Charlotte said to Hoagland as they motored home to their new Spanish-Italian house with its sun porches and green-tiled roof. "I like to do any little thing

like that to cheer her up. I don't want her to think I've forgotten her just because I'm so happy." And in the studio, where she had sought him out, Kate flapped her hands at a sympathetic Joe and cried: "*Joe—Green*—I'm *dead!* Though of course I want to be nice to Charlotte and Hoagland, and it was *very* kind of them."

Chapter Thirteen

"TELEPHONE, mother! Charlotte."

"Oh, bother! Turn off the hose, Joe, will you, dear? I wish to goodness Charlotte would get over thinking she has to call me up every day. It always comes just when I'm at the bottom of the back yard or in the middle of a cake or something. . . . Hello!"

"Well, Aunt Kate! I hope you weren't doing anything."

"Oh, hello, dear! No, indeed, I was just doing a little sprinkling. It was too hot for it till after supper. How are you? I was sort of worried when you didn't telephone all day ——"

"I was at a bridge lunch at Marian Cressy's."

"Oh yes, I know; you told me you were going. How was it?"

"Oh, very nice."

"Who was there, Charlotte? What did you wear?"

"Oh, just the usual crowd."

"Did you have a nice lunch? It's been so hot I haven't wanted a thing but iced tea all day, myself, but to-night Mrs. Driggs sent over a bowl of home-made ice cream; it tasted awfully good. What did Marian have?"

"Oh, I don't remember exactly, but it was very nice. Well, Aunt Kate, don't go too hard this hot weather, and then you'll be all right. I ——"

"How's the baby?"

"She's very well, thank you."

"I finished the little dress for her, and, oh, Charlotte, just the tiny little tucks looked so cunning I didn't put on the lace ——"

"*I* see. Well, thank you very much, Aunt Kate."

"I'll try to get it over to you to-morrow some time. Oh, Charlotte, isn't this news about the war terrible? I can't think about another thing. What does Hoagland think?"

"Aunt Kate says what do you think about the war? . . . He's right here. I was just telling him you were asking what he thought about it. He says to tell you it won't last long. It's lucky we didn't go across this summer, isn't it? We have Nancy Lou to thank for that. Well, Hoagland says take care of yourself."

"That was Charlotte," she told Joe, sitting down on the porch steps beside him. His cigarette glowed in the dark. She could hear the cool drip-drip of watered plants.

"No!"

"She was at a bridge luncheon at Marian Cressy's to-day."

"My God!"

"Joe! What a way to talk! While I think of it, would you very much mind leaving a little package

there to-morrow as you go by? I'll wrap it up so that it'll be just a teeny weeny little one. It's a little dress I made for Nancy Lou; she's getting so fat none of her clothes fit her."

"All right."

"Well, you needn't. I can take it myself. I only thought it was so hot and you were going right by."

"*I* said all right."

"I know you did, but you didn't sound very enthusiastic."

"Nancy Lou scares me. She's so grand and bland in her baby carriage she looks like a dowager in an opera box."

"Well, I guess you can get over your terrible fright. What's the war news to-night, Joe? It's too hot to light the lights to see the paper."

"France ——"

"Listen! Wasn't that the telephone? No, I guess it was next door. Charlotte says it's going to be over soon. Hoagland says so."

But on an April morning, nearly three years later, it was not over when Charlotte telephoned to Kate dutifully, brightly, as she had telephoned almost every day.

"Well, Aunt Kate ——!"

"Oh, Charlotte! Hello! The most awful thing has happened. E's just broken the big Chinese bowl—the great big one with all the little pink and green and blue men and women—you know, the one I always

kept the strawberry stemmers in—*E* did. . . . Oh, *Char*lotte, not *he*, *E—Effa!* I don't dare say much, I'm afraid she'll hear me. The Palmers gave it to your Uncle Joe and me when we were married. I'm just broken-hearted, but I'm ashamed of myself to be feeling so badly over it with this ter*rif*ic news about us going to war. I can't help feeling thankful with my whole *soul* that there isn't any chance of Joe's going, on account of his eyes. It seems too awful. I can't get my mind on anything else—all the poor young men. What does Hoagland say?"

"He says it's high time we did go in. He's going to try for a commission."

"Oh, Charlotte! With the baby coming?"

"Well, we mustn't think of ourselves at a time like this, Aunt Kate."

"I know—but still— How are you, dear?"

"I'm getting on all right, thank you."

"I finished knitting a couple of little sacques. I made one pink and one blue, so we're safe either way. I'll bring them over some time to-day, or why don't you come to lunch with me? I'm not having anything but ——"

"I promised to have lunch with Mother Driggs, thank you, Aunt Kate."

"Well, come over afterward. Oh, how did your dinner party go off last night? Winnie came in for a minute with Nancy Lou—she looks *sweet* in that little new coat, Charlotte—and she said you had a ——"

"Oh, just Gladys and Jimmy Roberts."

"Well, you'll have to tell me all about it."

"There isn't very much to tell, they just came to dinner and then we played bridge. Well, take care of yourself, Aunt Kate; don't catch cold this changeable weather."

"Good-by, dear. Don't forget to come in this afternoon. I want you to see my scillas; they're a sight!"

She felt so safe about Joe, because of his eyes. But one day he came home and told her he had been accepted.

The world slipped under her feet, whirling from Monday to Tuesday, from Tuesday to Wednesday, so fast that she was dizzy, whirling her to the day when she must say good-by to him.

Do things! Do things! Don't stop to think! Don't let yourself remember that Joe is going to-morrow.

"Effa!"

"Yeh-a?"

Yeh-a! That girl! But you couldn't say a word to the Ashburns; they were so independent. Kate had to content herself with speaking in a voice full of quiet dignity, meant to convey her reproach.

"Please use a glass of the wild-grape jelly with the chicken to-night, Effa. Mr. Joe likes it better than currant. How's the oven for my cake?"

"Seems 'bout right, Mis' Green."

"I thought I'd try Mrs. Baylow's recipe. Mr. Joe

liked her cake so much the other day. Eggs—lemon—Effa, would you get me some butter? Oh, never mind; it says bake in an ungreased angel— *Effa!* Never mind, I don't need it!"

Whirrr, went the egg beater; the white of egg thickened into smooth foam. Don't think! Don't think!

"Oh, *mercy!* Here, Effa, just take this a minute. I forgot to telephone Goff's, and I'm afraid they'll be sending out the last delivery ——"

Once more in the kitchen, she hesitated, hurried to the telephone.

"Goff's? . . . Oh, this is Mrs. Green again, 29 Chestnut Street. I just ordered a quart of ice cream for this evening, half chocolate ice cream and half orange water ice. . . . No, no! I *did* order it. I want to change the order to all orange water ice. . . . Yes —a quart. . . . Yes—Mrs. J. M. Green, 29 Chestnut Street. All orange water ice; no chocolate ice cream. . . . Yes, that's right."

A nice mother she was, ordering half ice cream when Joe liked water ice so much better! Ordering chocolate ice cream for herself, whose heart was going to break to-morrow, when Joe was gone and she could give way.

When Joe came in she was marching through the house with a flaming screw of brown paper held out before her.

"What are you doing, mother? Being the Spirit of Battle?"

"We're going to have cauliflower. I'm trying to get rid of the smell. Dinner's ready when you are, darling."

Her Jodie! His blue eyes behind the steel-rimmed spectacles, the young bulge of his cheeks when he smiled at her across the bowl of greenish double daffodils from the garden. Don't think! Say anything, do anything, but don't think.

"Did you get in to say good-by to Aunt Sarah, Joe?"

"Oh, gosh!" cried Joe, with his mouth too full of hot biscuit.

"Oh, darling! It means so much to her. Well, I'll tell her you tried to, but you were too busy. Have just a *teeny* other little piece, just this little bit of breast?"

She was brave up to the last minute. And then she went to pieces, just because Joe had saved his cake icing for last. Her little boy, her Jodie! Tears poured over her face; her body shivered and shuddered; every wall went down.

It was anguish to Kate that Joe was sent to France; it was glory, too. Service flags hung in the glass panel of the Driggs' front door and in the back window of the Driggs' limousine, but the mother of Joe, fighting in France, could condescend to the mother of Hoagland, safe in America, although Joe was only a

private and Hoagland was a lieutenant. She condescended to her; she envied her wildly.

Hoagland was at Camp Sevier, dreadfully bored, and getting fatter than ever, but looking well in his puttees and Sam Browne belt. And Charlotte was busy with Red Cross committees and canteens and surgical dressings, in spite of the fact that Hoagland Driggs, Third, was born in July.

The studio at 29 Chestnut Street was a splendid room to make surgical dressings in. Twice a week the Westlake women met there, in white aprons and veils, to cut absorbent cotton and fold gauze.

One October morning Carrie Pyne stayed to help tidy up after a meeting. "I had a letter from Joe to-day," Kate told her. "Look! Will you just kindly look at these pads? That's Violetta Mortimer! I'll have to make every single one over again. *Hon*estly ——!"

"You didn't see my scissors anywhere, did you, Kate? Oh, dear! I hope I haven't folded them into a surgical dressing ——"

"Poor Mrs. Baylow, she looked awfully. Did you notice? I didn't dare ask her if she'd heard from Laddie lately. You know I think waiting at home must be almost worse than the fighting. Anyway, they're in *France!* That's always been the dream of my life ——"

"Kate, speaking of letters, if I tell you something, will you *prom*ise not to tell? I decided I wasn't doing

my bit, just knitting and surgical dressings, so I'm a *marron* now."

"A *what*, Carrie?"

"A *marron*. That's what they call them—a godmother," said Carrie, blushing. "I'm a godmother, not really, you know, but the way they do now, to one of our boys over there. I just sort of write to him and send him things, you know, Kate, little things like chocolate and trench mirrors—*don't* tell Mrs. Whipple! And try to be—well—kind of an—oh, I don't know—sort of an inspiration, only that sounds so conceited. And then he writes to me, and I—oh, just sort of help him with his problems—at least, I do if I can get him to tell me any—and send him little poems I cut out, and things, anything that might be an inspiration, or interesting items about things—well, at least—mine's named Harold Finkelstein. I don't quite understand all of his answers, I think they must be slang or something, or maybe he's a little shell-shocked, but anyway ——"

"Why, I think that's awfully nice."

"It isn't anything, really, only I—*don't* tell, Kate! —I just thought—maybe— Of course *you* have Joe ——"

"I had a letter—oh, I told you. Guess who he's seen? Hartley Harrison. He's over there with the Y. M. C. A.—Joe says Hartley's having a lovely, lovely time ——"

"Mercy! How *can* ——?"

"Joe's joking, you know. He's the bravest thing, Carrie; he's joking all the time, and he never complains a bit except about things like having to march miles to be entertained when they're tired out and cold and sleepy."

Kate wrote fat letters to Joe, launched packages of socks and cigarettes and chocolates into space, and lay at night staring with aching eyes at flaming pictures painted on the dark. And Joe wrote back about sleeping in a barn and having a hen lay an egg beside him, and told her that the star shells were pretty, only one couldn't give them calm undivided attention. He never wrote to her about the agony of unbearable, unceasing noise, the exhaustion of long marches when nothing was left conscious but huge feet lead-heavy with mud, carrying them on—where? Of stumbling through mist and fever-mist, tripping over huddled bodies, lost, far behind the others, with a bullet in his thigh, trying to keep up, as Jodie used to try to keep up with the older children.

"Hoagland has ptomaine poisoning from eating lobster in Greenville," Kate wrote to Joe, and Joe wrote back from the base hospital: "Give Hoagland my sympathy, and tell him what I heard J. Hartley Harrison telling a gent from the Bronx—'We're all of us soldiers under the same great Captain, Buddy!' "

And then the endless War was ended. Joe was coming home.

Kate, who had shown smiling courage during the

months she was stretched on the rack, wept because her old hat was such a sight, and a scheme of steaming the velvet over the teakettle and putting a feather "fancy" on the side resulted in a worse mess than before.

"You'd a right to buy a new hat, with Joe comin home," Effa told her.

"I can't afford it, and I guess *Mister* Joe won't care what an old woman like me looks like."

"Now, listen, Mis' Green, you're just talkin' foolish cause you're nervous. You wash your eyes and go on down to Small's. I'll feed the both of yuh on boiled rice till we make it up."

Oh, it was cold! Tiny flakes sifted from a lead-gray sky. Suppose there was a blizzard, and Joe's train was held up? Well, if it was, she would die, that was all there was to it.

"I don't suppose it's any use asking you for something inex*pen*sive, Miss Minnie."

"Well, if it isn't Mrs. Green! You're quite a stranger!"

"My son's coming home to-morrow!"

"Is that a fact? Well, now, we'll have to find something real pretty to celebrate. How about this little black-and-gold wrap-around turban?"

"Now, Miss Minnie, you know me better than that! I'm *ages* too old."

"Goodness! how you talk! Why, Mrs. Jackson was just in and bought a little hat in the new *le diable*

red—this is the front, dear. Look, it looks lovely behind. Well, there's lots of others."

She bought a toque of cornflower-blue velvet finally. "I'm getting giddy in my old age," she told herself, carrying home the round box with "J. M. Small & Son, Modes, Manteaux, & Dry Goods" on the cover; but her cheeks were pink and her eyes shone. She stopped at Clark's for some flowers. What if she couldn't afford them? Mr. Clark stopped working on the sheaf of palms, white roses, and purple ribbon that he was always arranging, and waited on her himself, waving aside his assistants.

"Joe's coming home to-morrow morning, Mr. Clark!"

"Well, that's great news, Mis' Green; it surely is! I read a piece in the paper about how he got wounded in the limb; my wife cut it out. We all think a lot of Joe, always hev since he was a little feller and used to be down here alla time ——"

She followed him as he hobbled down the greenhouse aisles. Warm moist heat, hissing pipes, pots of calceolarias, hideous, like the things you had to pull out when you were cleaning chickens. Spicy-sweet carnations brushing her cheek. Why did she suddenly remember her husband?

"Mr. Green used to be a great one for comin' in, in the old days. He was certainly one fine gentleman. Always liked to hev a carnation for his buttonhole."

"Yes, he did. What kind are these, Mr. Clark, these pale-pink ones?"

"Daybreak."

"What a lovely name!"

"'Tain't quite so lovely when the alarm clock's ringin'. I've cut a few extra teas, Mis' Green; 'tain't every day Joe comes home."

His train would get in at half past seven in the morning. What an hour!

"Good night, Effa. Now you'll *sure*ly be here at seven?"

"Sure, I'll be here all righty."

To-morrow morning! To-morrow morning! How could she live through the night?

I'd better make a list—I know I won't remember a thing to-morrow. Let's see. Tell Effa to light parlor fire. Call up Goff's and order orange water ice ——

She was trembling so that she couldn't write. Better go to bed; she would have to get up so early to-morrow.

But her legs shook so that halfway up the stairs she had to crumple down. The tension of months relaxed; tears of relief poured through her shaking fingers. To-morrow morning Joe would be home again.

Chapter Fourteen

"NOW, Joe, if you don't take your evening clothes to New York I think you'll be very foolish," Kate advised, making Joe, who had been wavering, decide not to take them. So when Bill Salisbury said, "You've got to come to dinner to-night. My cousin Evelyn Thorne's sailing on Thursday, and I'm giving a party for her," he had to answer, "I haven't any dinner coat."

"Doesn't matter; we're having dinner in a dirty Russian place. Evelyn thinks it has atmosphere, or some such damn nonsense."

"I don't know how to talk to girls."

"Like hell you don't! Remember, my son, little William was with you in France. Hinky dinky parly voo! Anyway, we'll be dancing."

"Gosh, Bill—I can't dance the tango ——"

But here he was, late, because when he arrived at the address Bill had given him he had wandered about a long time before he found Katya's down in a basement under "The Kiddie's Korner. Juvenile Apparel Shoppe."

"Here's the boy! Joe Green himself, not a moving picture! Mrs. Ricardo. Take care of him, Susette, and tell him the worst about the rest of us."

They had begun dinner. Half-smoked cigarettes and bits of pickled fish lay on the oil-streaked plates, the wineglasses were blood-red bubbles. A snow-drift of ermine hung over a pushed-back chair.

"That belongs to the pot of orange marmalade prowling around out there with the boneless young man with black lacquer hair. Her name's Mrs. Milton Prather, and you mustn't laugh out loud when you meet her."

Joe looked at Mrs. Prather. Red good-natured face, waved orange hair, fat body in orange chiffon, ankles bulging from crossed gold ribbons, insteps bulging from tight gold slippers—one could imagine the cruel red lines when the slippers came off, the burst with which the stays popped open. She had sketched on black eyebrows and rubbed blue around her eyes, and a little gold case dangling from her finger held the scarlet for her large square mouth.

"The creature she's dancing with is named Harry Fisher. She takes him everywhere she goes, to dance with her and kiss her hand—wait till you see it! As if he were smelling something bad and throwing it away. Some people say he acts as a maid for her, but that's not true; she has another maid. She took dancing lessons from somebody—Maurice, wasn't it, Bill? At a million dollars a minute. She's not so bad if you don't look higher than the feet. Oh, my God, no! I take it all back! I've drunk too much already; I'm getting maudlinly kind and charitable."

Mrs. Prather came to the table, trailing almost overpowering billows of a perfume called La Tendresse, followed by Harry Fisher walking as if he were leaning back on the air, with lifted shoulders and hands dangling as limply as stuffed gloves sewn to the cuffs of swinging empty sleeves. Susette Ricardo jumped up.

"He really makes me feel too ill to stay at the table. Come on and dance, and I'll scream in your ear. The worst of this crazy place is that just as you get to bawling the music stops and you tell the world. Do you know Evelyn Thorne? Sitting with Ralph Levinson? He's mad about her, has been for ages. That's why he fools round with the rest of us, though he despises us. She'll marry him some day—he has millions, and Evelyn's a pussy cat who loves her cream. His father came over in the steerage, but his mother is the only woman in New York who goes in to dinner in gloves. Grand isn't the word for her—going around in a bottle-green motor, with a bottle-green chauffeur and footman with sable collars, leaving cards. You *must* have heard of him; he's the one who lends such large sums to royalty that it has to go to his London parties—*you* know! His sister Esther married Lord Waller, and Bernice married the Dugald of Clandugald, or one of those old Scotch ballads. Lord Waller's a very High Churchman—they have a private chapel with their portraits kneeling on each side of the altar—don't you love it? And he plays the organ and

does *petit point* chair seats, and is also, if you'll believe me, a noted big-game hunter. As for the Clandugalds, hoot mon, and also oy oy! What did I tell you about the music stopping? Now Ralph knows I was talking about him."

Joe looked at Evelyn Thorne, sitting on the wall seat by Ralph Levinson, her beautiful painted mouth smiling at something he had just said to her. She was the only person in the hot noisy room who looked cool and relaxed, with her white skin, her blue eyes with shadows about them that gave her a deceptive air of delicacy, and that she slightly helped, and her silver dress like armor. Painted on the wall above their heads, a squat Oriental potentate in star-spattered turquoise robes and a towering feathered turban, raspberry-pink and wrapped in pearls, strolled under a blue-green palm tree, leading on a leash a snow-white damsel in chiffon trousers.

"Let's try eating, for a minute."

They sawed at sauce-smothered beefsteak.

"I don't seem to be making much of an impression on this. Are you?"

"You'd have to take a course under Lionel Strongfort."

"The music is the thing this place runs on. Stir the emotions, and let the tummys look out for themselves. I don't seem to be making any more of an impression on you than I am on the beefsteak. Stop looking at

Evelyn for one minute, and look at me, or I shall bust into tears and stick a fork into you."

"Is she engaged to him?"

"Oh, *Lord!* Have you a few millions?"

"Not so you'd notice it."

"Then put Evelyn out of your little head. Anyway, she's being taken abroad in a few minutes by Mrs. Prather, so it's too late to get excited."

"Taken ——?"

"Yes, Marmalade travels with her little retinue—Harry and another maid, and Mrs. Thorne and Evelyn. She can afford them. Look at the diamonds! Like a frosty morning."

The dancing ended and Ralph brought Evelyn back to her place. Joe looked at her, slim in her silver sheath. She oughtn't to be going abroad with those people.

She smiled at him. She couldn't help it. There was something about him that enchanted her. A cold clear air from the forest and the sea blew into the hot exhausting room.

"Aren't you going to dance with me at all?"

He gazed back at her with round blue eyes, adoring, but necessarily silent, for he was eating watercress, and the stems were unexpectedly long and intertwined. He was like a marble statue in a Southern garden, sprouting with maidenhair. She began to laugh.

"Come along! Come along!"

Through the music wild flowers bloomed under the

bitter sky of a Russian spring. We have found each other, their bodies sang together.

"Why are you going away?"

Mrs. Prather danced past them violently, singing at the top of her lungs, waving a glittering hand and shouting, "Hello, Sweetheart!" to Joe. Susette Ricardo drifted by, a black butterfly. Her white hand dripped a lighted cigarette over Bill Salisbury's shoulder; her face, haggard near to, was childish at a distance, framed in short ash-blond hair. Under the painted palm tree Ralph Levinson sat watching.

The music stopped. Joe and Evelyn stood close together, waiting, silent, until it began again and she came into his arms as if she were coming home.

"Evelyn! Joe! We're going!"

"Where do we go from here, boys? It's too late for a show."

"Let's go somewhere and dance."

"The Ritz?"

"Can't; the Joe-person isn't dressed. Let's go to Arcadia. Anything goes there," suggested Mrs. Prather, wrapping herself in ermine. "She ought to be shot for her fur," Susette mocked, half aloud.

"Who told you I was going away, Joe? I can't say Mr. Green; it's so long and so hard to pronounce," Evelyn said as they waited, shivering, for taxis.

"Mrs. Ricardo."

"She told you other things, too. Poor Susette, she doesn't care what she says or does to-night. She's ter-

ribly in love with her husband still, and he's getting married to-day to the Yardley girl."

The band was blaring slowly in Arcadia; the floor was crowded with undersized boys with belted coats and shaved necks, and girls with big pearl bead necklaces and flat curls stuck to their cheeks. With fixed eyes and steadily moving jaws they went through their elaborate steps. Here and there a couple spun with the tranced faces of dervishes. The women of Bill Salisbury's party looked about them, smiling and starry-eyed, pretending not to know they were being noticed.

Joe and Evelyn were together again, speaking to each other without sound or words, together for dance after dance, keeping away from the others.

The lights went down, the orchestra played a waltz, quietly and slowly, and the dancers sang as they danced. Lost children, singing in the dark, happy and gentle and good, forgetting for a little while that they were lost. Then the lights glared; the tribal drums began to beat; saxophones moaned and laughed.

"I want to go home. Will you take me?"

Colored fire poured and cascaded over Broadway, streaming trembling lines of lilac and rose, chartreuse color, moonlight green, a pure and innocent blue. Messages of fire were written in the sky, seen through a veil of lightly falling snow. The subway lamps were blue night sky. worn thin, so that heaven shone

through. A river of people flowed around Joe and Evelyn; fat couples hurrying to catch the last train home to New Jersey suburbs; middle-aged quartettes from Riverside Drive, Lucille being conscientiously girlish with Ada's husband, Ada with Lucille's; exquisite silly débutantes dancing up and down as they waited for their motor cars; smooth young men; prostitutes; visitors from points West. All caught up together in the shimmering web of life, excitement, pain, laughter, bright threads, dark threads, tangled in the wild weaving.

In the taxi her lips blossomed under his. The street flowed by so fast, as they held each other in their fragile and immortal moment.

"Evelyn! We love each other!"

"I know! I know!"

"You're trembling so ——"

She stirred, lifting her faintly gleaming face. Her wrists ached when he touched her. Pleasure or pain? She hardly knew. Only a feeling so intense that she could barely live.

"I never knew anything could happen like this!"

The taxi stopped, and they said good night in front of a sleepy doorman.

"I'll come to-morrow."

"When?"

"About four? I'll get through somehow."

"Get through what?"

"I'm here on business—didn't I tell you? Vacuum cleaners. What's so funny about that?"

"Oh, Joe! As long as I've known you, you still have the power to surprise me!"

He wanted to slap the doorman on the back so hard that he would knock the stuffing out of him; he wanted to run, tossing his arms, shouting. He paid the taxi driver, seventy-five cents, with a dollar for a tip, and swung off through the snow.

To have found her—to have found the answer to life's question!

How did he know it was true? That she was a living girl who loved him? Only by this tide of feeling that surged through him. He had to stand still, caught breathless in the flood of his love for her.

A small cold wave of sorrow crept through. She was going away, and he must let her go, because he was too poor to take care of her yet, and take care of his mother, too. People no longer gave Kate orders, as they had when they were sorry for her after her husband died, when she had Jodie and Charlotte to bring up; and everything was so much more expensive now; her little amount went almost no distance.

I'll work twice as hard, Joe thought. I'll get extra work to do at night. I'll manage somehow, because if I should lose you, my darling ——

He remembered Susette Ricardo's face; he understood her anguish.

But they could never lose each other now, no matter what happened. If we never saw each other again, we would belong to each other forever. The two broken pieces have been found, have been fitted together into the perfect whole.

Evelyn, Evelyn, what is this love you have brought me? Higher than happiness, deeper than peace.

The streets ran by him. The houses were dark, except for a lighted window here and there where life or death could not wait until morning.

He never knew where he walked that night, lost in thoughts of her, lost in feeling that welled up, drowning thought. At last, far up on Riverside Drive, he realized that he was hollow with hunger, that a dull pain was throbbing in his bad leg. Snow no longer fell; the river gleamed faintly lead color. He was the only living being in a world drowned in the cold sad light of dawn.

Chapter Fifteen

EVELYN opened her eyes and saw her dress lying on the floor, a pool of moonlit water, saw kicked-off silver slippers, spilled powder on the dressing table, Ralph's gardenias broken and brown in a toothbrush glass. Happy, happy! Had it really happened? What proved it? Nothing but this singing surge within, this fizzing, bubbling ——

She couldn't stay in bed, though it was only half past eight. The shades were still down in the living room. Spilled ashes, last night's paper, crushed sofa pillows. They had taken the awful little furnished apartment because it was cheap and the address was good. She snapped up the shades, letting in pale March sunlight on the gas log framed in mustard-colored tiles, with its fire screen of imitation tapestry —an Italian peasant girl with a basket of grapes—the chairs, so large, so uncomfortable, long in the wrong places, sloping just too much, the ceiling light in its ground-glass wash basin. But they never lit that; they had made a lamp from a big creamy jar, shaded in pink; they had put around photographs, signed dashingly in blackest ink, "Tout à vous, de Casserelli," or, "Toujours, ta Berthe," and had replaced the "Lady with the Fan" in sepia by the painting of Mrs.

Thorne's grandmother. Over the fireplace the whole room lay drowned in a pool of dim old mirror.

She was hungry; she went out to the kitchen for some breakfast. Black Clara was lying on her folded arms on the kitchen table, her behind high in air, one large foot trailing on its side on the floor, reading the morning paper. She gave a leap and a shout when Evelyn spoke to her.

"Isn't it a di*vine* day, Clara? It's so lovely I couldn't stay in bed."

Clara glanced at the ordinary day, and thrust out a lower lip like a camel's.

"Will you make me some coffee? I have to go out."

While the coffee bubbled in the percolator and Clara scraped the scorch off the toast, she tried to read the morning paper. José Martinez, young Mexican, was hanged to-day for the murder of his sweetheart, Angelina Perez—jealousy. . . . Field mice are already leaving their nests, farmers report. . . . Woman of fifty weds youth of seventeen. . . . The very large hat, shadowy, picturesque, imported magnolias $1.95, pond lilies $1.25 to $2.50. . . . The wedding of Miss Rosamond Yardley, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Horace Garrison Yardley, and Louis Ricardo, followed by a reception at the Colony Club—poor Susette!

No use trying to read; she was too happy.

Out on the street she felt the happiness and pain of the people who passed washing through her in

waves; her barriers against the world were down. He was here, in this same city with her ——

She bought a coffee ring on a lace-paper mat, a halo for a German baby angel. Then to the florist's for yellow primroses, lots of little bunches, white lilac, lilies of the valley stiff with freshness, cool pointed pale-yellow tulips like spring sunlight. The box was so big she had to take a taxi, and leave it shuddering in front of the door while she went up and borrowed sixty cents from Clara. She had spent her last penny on the flowers.

From the dining room came Nevin's "Narcissus," accompanying a firm voice barking, "One—two—one —two—up—down — up—down—right—left—right —left—*higher*—two ——" On the floor in front of the gramophone, in a chemise, and with good imitation pearls, a little too big, in her ears, Mrs. Thorne lay on her back, lifting her legs in the air.

She greeted her daughter plaintively, rolling her eyes.

"Evelyn! What on earth have you been doing out so early?"

"I've got a beau coming to tea, and I had to get some things."

Do people ever die of happiness? she thought, going into the pantry with her flowers. And she suddenly hugged herself, spinning around on her heel. Oh, *Joe*—! In the kitchen Clara was moaning a song:

"Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus!
Steal away, steal away home. Ah ain't got long to stay here."

"Clara! Can I have the scrub bucket?"

"Hol' on till ah dumps the potatoes out of it."

"Mah Lawd, He calls me, He calls me by the thundah,
The trumpet sounds within-a mah soul ——"

"You have an engagement this afternoon, haven't you, ma darling?" Evelyn shouted through the roaring water as she filled the bucket for her flowers.

"Oh, Evelyn, have I? *Again?* Is it Ralph? Well, it ought to be. Oh, all right, I suppose so."

So at half past three she put on a small close hat and glossy furs, hand-me-downs from Mrs. Prather, and went out, chic and expensive-looking, with a hole in one shoe that the chill of the pavement struck through.

Evelyn shook out the filet-lace tea-cloth and brought in the coffee ring. Happy! Happy! But her hands shook so that she broke one of the best teacups. Damn!

Four silver drops from the clock. Her insides plunged. Was she going to be sick? The gas log made a popping sound—phluff!—as she lit it. The clock hand moved slowly on. She was quivering, listening for the bell. The gas fire went fff-fff; motor cars blew their horns below. Of course he wasn't coming.

And now she felt that she couldn't bear it if he did come; she couldn't bear ever to see him again.

The telephone rang, and the blood leaped to her heart, thundered in her ears; her legs shook so she

could hardly reach it; she was shaken, smothered. And it was the lady who calls up with such a sweet voice to explain that Mr. Mawson wants to take one of his very lovely artistic photographs of her in her own home, with absolutely *no* obligations attached.

Then he came—Joe, so ridiculous, with his ears, and his spectacles, so everything she needed. She felt her mouth stretch into a wide delighted smile.

"I hardly expected you."

"Liar!"

"Isn't this a crazy little place? Have a cigarette?"

"How can I let you go? And I can't say stay with me, marry me now, and let them go without you, because I'm so damn poor ——"

She looked at him with eyes full of strange and innocent wisdom. It was as if she were saying: "We have come a long way to find each other, and we have only a little while to live at the longest. Love me until I die."

"I wanted you all night long."

"I wanted you."

"I'll work like the devil—I'll find other ways of making money. Evelyn, you're mine whatever happens. This is something we've got to go through together—we haven't any choice about it."

"Oh, hold me! Hold me! Never let me go!"

He was gone. On the tea table the blue flame quivered under the kettle, the clean cups waited. They

had forgotten to have any tea. She poured herself a cup and drank it thirstily.

How had she looked to him? Had she been lovely in his eyes? She tried to see herself in the mirror in the positions he had seen. Awful! She powdered her nose and put on some lip salve to help things; they did, but too late now!

Only one more day. She remembered Clara's song:

> The trumpet sounds within-a mah soul,
> Ah ain't got long to stay here.

The next morning. Her bath water roared in, steaming. The mirror showed her a face veiled like a bride, then changed to a sheet of secret silver. She poured in almost a third of the big bottle of bath salts. The green crystals melted in the faint green of the hot water—well, not entirely; some of them were still very sharp to sit on. She had a book open on the rim of the tub, but she was too happy to read. She was really floating in this quivering cloud of heat and fragrance. She lay smoking one of the amber cigarettes Ralph Levinson had given her, that made her feel a little dizzy, paying no attention to Mrs. Thorne's cries: "Don't lie there soaking, Evelyn; it's very weakening!"

"Miss *Ev*'lyn! Miss *Ev*'lyn! Mistah Green's hyah!"

"Heavens! Tell him to wait a minute ——"

She came to him fragrant and warm in her padded blue-silk dressing gown. His face was cold and glowing.

"Heavens! What an hour! Well, wait, and I'll get dressed and we'll take a walk, shall we? Mother's going to have the place full of storage men and things all day. Isn't it the limit?"

In the Park the gray squirrels rippled across the paths.

"The pine woods at home are full of squirrels. Wait till I get you out in those woods in old clothes."

Evelyn instantly felt that her soul's desire was a country life, away from the turmoil of the city.

"Joe, will I ever see them? Is it real?"

"You bet your life it's real!"

"Let's not wait too long ——"

The branches of the cherry trees were piled with light snow. "They're prettier this way than when they bloom, really; they're such a dirty pink."

"What are?"

"What are what? I don't know, Joe, I don't remember what we were talking about."

Apprehensive children, sunk into joggled bundles on Shetland ponies, were led past them; little boys shouted under an echoing arch. They went into the hot stuffy bird house. No one was there but a slow old German, peering through his glasses at the flamingoes with their long dangling legs and pink, black-tipped bills. They

ruffled their pink and white feathers and grunted like pigs.

"My great-aunt has a parrot like that one over there."

"What did you say?"

"What? I don't know what I said."

Then the old man went out.

"God, Evelyn! Kiss me ——"

The flowers had faded. They never lasted when the gas log was lit. Evelyn had saved the best tulips, although their edges were tightly rolled and their color had gone dead. In a gold-lace-collared green glass vase belonging to the apartment they made a centerpiece for the painful dinner, lighted by electric lights glaring in frosted glass shades like bathroom lamps, for the candlesticks were packed. Clara dragged around the table, offering slanted dishes with a lax hand, but no one ate much, and more than once tears stung into the women's eyes or Joe flushed darkly from the low-voiced, well-bred, wounding conversation. When dinner was over Mrs. Thorne said good night almost inaudibly through barely moving lips, and went to her room.

"You mustn't mind mother, Joe; she has a bad headache. And she's worried so much and so long about being poor, her one idea for me is to feel that I'm safely married to some one with plenty of money. You see, she doesn't really know you."

"She doesn't know anything about me except that I'm as poor as dirt. Why *should* she jump up and down and scream with joy? Oh, Evelyn, if I only had more money! Or if I didn't have anyone else depending on me! Your mother's right—twenty-eight years old, and I have to ask you to wait!"

She shivered, pulling closer about her the shawl Ralph Levinson had brought her from Spain. She had worn it to cover the shabby dress, too old to take, that would be given to Clara in the morning. On an ivory background huge dark-hearted roses, soft yellow and pale red, and leaves and tendrils of blue-green, shifted and gleamed as her body moved beneath them.

They were both crazy. Why had she done this insane thing, promised to marry a stranger, so poor, so different from the people of her world? Yet as she turned to look at him she knew that was why she loved him. He was different. Instead of tense excitement he brought her rest; he brought fresh air, cold water, secret bread.

"Evelyn—" Joe said, miserably.

She came to him swiftly, sweetly.

"Darling, it's going to be all right. I know it! I know it!"

"Oh, it is, Evelyn; it is! I'm going to work like hell. I never cared much before, as long as I made enough for mother and me; I always thought of it as just something to do till I got going with designing scenery. I

had a crazy idea that I was going to do something wonderful sometime ——"

"You are, too!"

"I don't care now. I just want to make enough money so we can be married."

"Joe darling, it won't be so very long. Must you be so unhappy?"

He groaned, burying his face on her breast.

"You mustn't suffer so! I can't bear it!"

He took her dark head between his hands, and kissed her closed eyes, tasting the salt of her tears.

"To-morrow ——"

"Keep me! Don't let me go!" she cried, strangely.

"Oh, my God, it's all wrong!"

"I thought love would make me happy. Joe, save me! Tell me that nothing can ever come between us."

"I wish we could go to sleep in each other's arms to-night and never wake up again."

"Oh, no, no! I want to be happy!"

Chapter Sixteen

KATE gave a cry of delight, and jumped up so quickly that the card table rocked, and a splash of water leaped from the glass to the poster she was painting for St. Stephen's spring bazaar.

"*Joe!* Well, for mercy's sake! I didn't expect you to-day, darling. How are you? I expected you yesterday, and then when you didn't come I thought you wouldn't come till to-morrow, because I thought maybe you'd remember it was Effa's day off and there wouldn't be much for supper—what a *pretty* tie, Joe! Did you get that in New York? It makes you look very English, all dotty. Joe Green, you didn't take any of your stage scenery, and I *told* you to! I told you to take the set for that sea play and show it to Belasco or somebody while you were in New York. Yes, you could; you could call up ahead and make an appointment. You'll certainly never get anywhere by hiding it under your old raincoat in the closet. Well, but I think it's so foolish, when you do such beautiful work, not to let anyone *see* it! I'm not going to scold you, though; I'm too glad to see you. Did you have a nice time? I want to hear every single solitary thing you did. What plays did you see?"

"I didn't go to the theater."

"Didn't go to the *the*ater? Well, why not? Oh, I did wish you'd gotten home last night. There was the best movie at the Palace—Charlie Chaplin in 'Shoulder Arms'—he's in the army, you know, and of course it's *scream*ingly funny, but very touching, too. One place everybody gets packages from home except Charlie, and he turns away so sadly and eats the cheese out of the mousetrap. Well, I mustn't tell you about it, because you may get a chance to see it sometime, and I don't want to spoil it for you. I hadn't an i*dea* of going. I was just planning to stay quietly at home and finish these posters. How do you like them?"

"They're fine!"

"Oh, I think they're awful—not striking enough. This one's rather pretty. Look, Joe, the old-fashioned little girl. But this is *aw*ful—*when* will I learn not to try to do blue skies with water color? They always streak. Still, the effect isn't bad, is it? I guess they'll have to do; anyway, I'm certainly not going to waste any more time; and they have to have them tomorrow. I would have finished them last night, only Charlotte and Hoagland came to get me to go to the movies. Charlotte's had a permanent wave. What *did* you do if you didn't go to the theater?"

"Bill Salisbury had a dinner - ——"

"Then you *did* need your dinner coat! Joe Green, what did I tell you?"

"No, I didn't. It was in a Russian place; you didn't have to dress."

"*Rus*sian! Well! That must have been interesting. Oh, Joe, I don't know why Russian makes me think of Mrs. Carr-Smith—yes, I do, Russian sables. *You* know, that Mrs. Carr-Smith that puts on such airs, Mrs. Roberts's friend. Don't you remember? Mrs. Roberts was having a little tea for her yesterday? Oh, Joe, *I* told you! *Pa*tronizing! I didn't like her at all! All about visiting her dear friend Countess Somebody or other in Paris—old boaster—and then she said to me in this su*per*ior tone, 'And where do *you* stop in Paris?' Look, Joe, like this. 'And wheah do *you* stop in Paris?' And when I said I'd never been to Paris she raised her eyebrows and said in the most in*cred*ulous voice, '*Imag*ine!' But I got even—I called her Mrs. Smith; it made her madder than hops. Oh, Joe, it's lovely to have you home again. I missed you awfully. I went over to Aunt Sarah's for supper Tuesday night. They want to give up the house and board somewhere, only Aunt Sarah says she's afraid they might get in with a family that would insist on being pleasant to them—you know the way she talks. Carrie had a dreadful cold, as usual, and Benjie's learned to make a sound just like her blowing her nose—it's un*can*ny! I must stop talking and go and see if there's anything for supper; I don't believe there's a thing. Look, Joe, what a pretty sunset! And a little new moon. I hope you have some money in your pocket—*I* certainly haven't!"

The ship was cleaving the sea, turning back the

water in two folds of surging foam, going on and away, farther and farther, carrying Evelyn from him. What was she doing now? He could not know, and it was torture to him; he could hardly bear to think of her leading a separate life in which he had no part, in which she did not need him.

They had played bridge in the smoke room all afternoon. Mrs. Prather had been so successful that her gold mesh bag looked as if it were about to bear a golden litter. Now, with the third round of cocktail glasses empty, and the napkin-lined dish of potato chips down to salty fragments, her chin seemed to wag detached, like a grotesque plaster figure in a shop window, as she settled to anecdotes greeted by roars of laughter.

"So the fireman said to the bride ——"

"Hey, steward! The same all round."

"Not for me," said Evelyn. She went out on deck, where the pre-dinner promenades were beginning. Linked ladies tottered past, clutching their hand-bags, men expanded their chests and stepped out virilely, because they were on the rolling sea, asking one another: "Ever happen to run across a fellow by the name of Henderson—Elwood T. Henderson of Henderson, Day, and McClintic? Plays the course at Twin Pines a good deal?" Mrs. Marx and Mrs. O'Dowd in their steamer chairs compared addresses of Paris shops. Evelyn leaned against the rail and

thought of Joe with happiness and misery. Surging foam, white clouds in the sky, sinking clouds of turquoise under the dark glassy slope of the water. Where are you now, my darling? Why are we apart?

The little rocking town goes on toward darkness, tied by invisible threads of memory to the shore, spinning them out as she goes. Some of them grow fine and vanish; some are so strong they will last to the end, drawing her back from every voyage. The white clouds change to long feathers of gold, motionless in the sky, while transparent dove-colored clouds flow over them, and over a thin white curl of new moon. The water says hush—hush ——

"Joe's not like other boys; he's never cared anything for girls," Kate complacently told Mrs. Driggs, Mrs. Roberts, Mrs. Jackson, so often that they grew weary of polite response. "I only wish he *did*. I just have to push him out to anything, and my dearest wish is to have him happily married to some nice girl." And then was in a panic if he looked with the mildest interest at the nicest girl.

She loved the evenings when she put "Forgotten" or "Little Gray Home in the West" on the Victor, and played Canfield, while Joe read the paper.

"Where's that Jack of diamonds? When the *toil* of the *long* day is *past*, I will *come* to con-*tent*-ment and *rest*—too high! Who's that a photograph of, on the society page, Joe?"

"Miss Marie Louise Fielding."

"Oh! What's she done?"

"Nothing."

"Look, Joe! All these little hearts out, and the ace under where I can't get it! I believe I'd have gone out, only for that. Do you suppose she's a daughter of those Fielders Charlotte knows?"

"I hardly think so."

"Lit-tul gray home in—the—*west!* Well, no rest for the weary. I've got to sew some new rosettes on my slippers. We might as well have a little music, though. It really is *won*derful when you stop to think, here we can have Caruso singing right in this room. I mean it almost seems like magic, doesn't it?"

She squatted on the floor, sliding records in and out of the cabinet Joe had made and she had labeled—Vocal, Instrumental, Dance, Red Seal. Not that any of them had been kept in their proper pigeonholes after the first week.

" 'Whispering Hope'—'Alexander's Rag Time Band'—Tar*ra* te*rump!* Tar*ra* te*rump!* There's an awful crack in 'Sweet Genevieve' ——"

She put on "Good-by," and settled to her sewing.

"Good-*by* forever! Good-*by* forever! Where are my scissors?"

> Hark, a voice from the far away,
> "Listen and learn, it seems to say,
> All the to-morrows shall be as to-day,
> All the to-morrows ——"

And suddenly she gave a little bounce that made Joe look up inquiringly. But she couldn't explain that she was so happy just because she had thought of the way the wild orange lilies would look next summer in the long wet grass on the Blue Hill Road. She saw Joe and herself in the high tremulous Ford, with a thermos bottle and a basket of sandwiches and deviled eggs, and a trowel, stored away in the back, streaming through the sweet air of summer evenings. "How devoted Joe Green is to his mother!" "Yes, their companionship is really beautiful!"

"There! Those don't look bad at all, with the new rosettes, do they, Joe? I India-inked the worst places, but I don't believe it shows. You haven't a pencil, have you, darling? I think I'll make my flower-seed list; it'll be planting time before you know it. I don't need any columbine; it's seeded itself all over the garden. Love-in-a-mist—I must have some of that. That's a pretty name, isn't it? They call it Devil-in-a-bush, too, but I think Love-in-a-mist is prettier. Would you get two packets of blue Miss Jekylls and one white, or would you get a blue and a white Miss Jekyll and a couple of double mixed? I must get some more wallflower seed, too. Mrs. *Carr*-Smith—I hope you heard me say Mrs. *Carr*-Smith—was telling us how beautiful it was in the Gardens of the Luxembourg ——"

And then she said what she had been planning to say

for so long. She brought it out with elaborate casualness, but her eager eyes were shining.

"Joe, I was thinking. A trip abroad wouldn't cost so terribly much if we ——!"

She was too breathless to finish.

"Mother, I can't. I have to save everything I possibly can, because I'm engaged to be married!"

"What kind of a girl would get engaged in three days?" Kate asked Carrie, beginning to cry again.

"Well, it certainly doesn't sound very *mod*est or *la*dylike! I know *I* certainly wouldn't!"

"Still, Joe's a good judge of character, Carrie, I must say that."

"Oh yes, I *know* ——"

"He says they're a very fine family, but they haven't any money, so they travel with this very rich lady, sort of as companions. You see, they've lived abroad a great deal since Mr. Thorne was killed by a fall out hunting ——"

"Oh, my!" said Carrie, much impressed by this creditable, even glamorous death.

"Joe says she has dark hair and light-blue eyes. I said sort of jokingly, though goodness knows, Carrie, I didn't *feel* much like joking, 'I suppose, of course, she's radiantly beautiful,' and he said, 'Why, yes, of course,' as if it had been in the papers! He says she has beautiful bones."

"Mercy! How gruesome!"

"Well, we all have bones, Carrie."

"Ye-es, I suppose so, but it sounds so sort of—spooky ——"

Kate talked the engagement over with Charlotte, too.

"I don't know what po*ssessed* him, Charlotte; it just seems utterly crazy to me."

"It does to us, too, Aunt Kate. Hoagland says he thinks they must both have been out of their minds."

"Well, I don't know that it's such an insane thing to fall in love with Joe!"

"We ——"

"After all, I think Joe's capable of picking out whoever he wants to marry, without our assistance."

Hoagland, indeed! Who had asked Hoagland for his opinions? But, oh dear! Oh dear!

How lonely and old I am, Kate thought. Look at my hands and my scrawny old neck! She glared at herself in the mirror. Why can't I *feel* old? It would be so much easier. But it doesn't matter. Joe doesn't see me any more, and there's nobody else to care. Two tears welled up, overflowed. She watched them trickle down her cheeks with mournful interest.

Youth flowing on, passing—no, not passing, but disappearing like those lost rivers that disappear underground. Her youth lay deep in her hidden heart.

She read the beauty advertisements. "Tired skins made lovely again"—"A few minutes' care each morning and night will accomplish wonderful results for

you"—"Erase those hateful lines around eyes and mouth"—"Complexions youthified." They said you could work this magic with a home-treatment box—balsam astringents, satiny water-lily creams, geranium-petal rouges. Of course I wouldn't use *rouge*, she thought. But it wouldn't hurt to try the other things. I needn't tell anyone.

Oh, but what was the use? Life was over for her, now, and her heart was broken.

But it couldn't be true. From Monday until Thursday was too short a time to work such destruction. If only they hadn't sent Joe to New York! If only they'd waited until this week! If only he'd looked up that man on Tuesday instead of Monday! If only there had never been a war! If only ——

She thought piteously that if she did not remind him of what he never forgot he would get over this delusion.

"Of course, not seeing her, he can keep his ideals about her," she explained to Carrie. "She's just a sort of dream girl to him now, and I'm afraid he's going to have a sad awakening if he sees her again. Well, I'm not taking it very seriously."

But tears came often, no matter how hard she tried to make it true that nothing had happened, by pretending.

I really believe my heart is broken, she thought, running her needle in and out of the strands of wool across her darning egg. How *does* Joe get such holes in his

heels? This awful feeling in my chest, so sore and heavy; sometimes I can hardly—*breathe*. She leaned forward suddenly and peered out of the window as the gate clicked. The expressman with a big box. What in the world?

"What is it, Effa?" she called over the stairs.

"Box from Flawrda."

"From Florida! That must be from Mr. and Mrs. Driggs. That's right, get the tack lifter ——"

The shrieking boards were torn back.

"Awrnges and grapefruit."

"Well, isn't that nice? That certainly was thoughtful. Will you look at the size of those grapefruit, Effa? You must take some home to-night. We'll get Mr. Joe to carry it down to the cellar when he comes home; it says keep in a cool place. I believe I'll just run over to Mrs. Whipple's right now with a few."

And she went out with a basket on her arm, through delicate spring sunlight. Yellow crocuses were wide open on the Wells lawn; bees crawled in and out of them. She smiled and hummed a little song, because she was taking somebody a present.

Evelyn lay awake at night, listening to all the little voices that spoke through the ship, thinking of Joe, loving him and wanting him. Often she wept. But the days were full of distractions.

She put on the soft white coat with its big fluff of white fur collar. It really was wonderfully becoming,

worth the work it had been to get Cornelia McMillan to give it to her. She had tried it on "just for fun," and exclaimed over it, and flattered Cornelia, and talked about being poor, until Cornelia, half kind, half contemptuous, had said: "Take it. I don't want it. No, go ahead. I've worn it so much I'm tired of it." Evelyn was sick of this hinting for presents, hinting for invitations, but she and her mother had had to do it so much that it was easier than it used to be. Anyway, the coat was a hundred times more becoming to her than to fat Cornelia with her sallow skin.

Mrs. Prather was still in bed, propped up by pink-satin pillows covered with lace, when Evelyn went in to say good morning. She wore a net cap to keep her waves in place, a rubber chin strap, a pink-chiffon jacket edged with swan's-down, and rubber gloves. Her breakfast tray was on the dressing table, rimmed with pushed-back silver and crystal, a heap of cigarette stubs, big square bottles of green and amber perfumes, a vase of nearly dead flowers, and a copy of *If Winter Comes*, which she could not read in public because it made her cry so that the mascara washed off her lashes and zigzagged sootily down her cheeks. An empty coffee cup, a bit of sausage, a bit of griddle cake with maple-syrup streaks, buttery crumbs, and grape skins, explained the need of the pink rubber corsets waiting on a chair.

The cabin smelled of fruit from all the mauve and gilt steamer baskets, with their pears and apples and

little unopened pots of jam. A wardrobe trunk frothed with beaded chiffon. The porthole curtains were drawn, but day cut through them with two knives of light. A staring whiskered griffon lay on top of the bed, a Pomeranian had crept under the covers and broke into needle-sharp barks as Evelyn came in.

"Hello, sweet thing! Hush, Puff! hush, darling! Muvver can't hear one *fing*. Well, so we land to-morrow morning!"

"It's been a wonderful trip."

"I'll say it has—for you! With the Irving fellow and Durand running around in circles. What would Ralph say?"

"What should he say? My affairs are none of Ralph's business."

"Oho! Your mother says he's coming over soon, that he's taken a palazzo in Venice. Drop that powder puff, Whisky! Take it away from him, Evelyn. Bad boy! Yes'a was, a *bad* boy! Muvver 'pank!"

Mrs. Prather didn't know she was engaged. No one knew but her mother, who wept about it at first, and later, more restfully, refused to take it seriously.

It had been a wonderful trip. Such nice people, and the thought of Joe's love for her a secret treasure. She went out on deck, passing Harry Fisher, who lay with his cap pulled over his closed eyes, rather green, and with a tray with a little tea awash in a cup and an untouched half of grapefruit beside him. She sat down in Mrs. Prather's chair, nestling into her soft light rug

with its enormous monogram, lifting her feet so the deck steward could tuck the rug around them. "Yes, indeed, a *heavenly* morning. . . . *Really?* Does anybody call *this* rough?"

She had her writing portfolio; she was going to finish her letter to Joe. But first she must look at this bright blue sky, feel the soft air stroke her cheeks and lift the ends of her hair. Then the steward stepped over the high brass sill with a tray of cups. She drank her bouillon and listened to the mild little man gotten up in loud sport clothes being polite to the bleached blonde two chairs away.

"How er *you* this merning?"

"Just fine, thenk you! How's Mrs. Dole?"

"Well, she feels kinda mean this merning; she thinks she musta eaten something."

"Say, there's quite a roll this merning; I guess a lot of folks eren't feeling any too good."

She would write to Joe about that cream-and-black checkerboard cap, the green knickerbockers bristly as wild cucumbers. She put down the cup and the sloppy saucer and opened her portfolio. But that was as far as the letter got, for Tommy Irving came along to pull her up—"That one don't mind showing her legs!" Mrs. O'Dowd told Mrs. Marx—and make her take a walk.

Blue sky, blue sea, tingling health, when so many of the rug-wrapped cocoons were wan, Tommy so tall and good-looking in his not-too-new English clothes,

refreshing reflections of herself as they passed the smoke-room windows, with her tight white cloche pulled down over her entrancing eyes, the white ruff of fur, her loose white gloves, her slim white-silk ankles. She felt eyes lifted over books; people spoke of them as they swung past.

"How about a dry Martini?"

"Starting cocktails at half past eleven?"

"Better late than never."

"All right, but twice around the deck first."

And there was John Durand, falling into step with them. She thrust a hand through John's arm, one through Tommy's, and they swept around the deck, not getting out of the way for anybody.

Chapter Seventeen

ACROSS the street, Noble was raking dead leaves. A rope of thick white smoke curled up from a pile in the ditch, Nancy Lou and Sonny Boy dove into rustling heaps and scattered them again. Charlotte's new coupé glittered in autumn sunlight by the mounting block, and Charlotte herself came down the front steps and crossed to where Kate squatted, planting bulbs in the border.

"Well, Aunt Kate! Busy gardening, I see."

"I'm putting in some new tulips, though I hadn't any business to buy them. Bleu Aimable—the description's *heav*enly. Can you *wait* for spring?"

"Well, I guess we'll have to. I don't know what else we can do about it."

"You have a new sweater!"

"Oh, not very new."

"I've never seen it before. I love that jade green. How's Mrs. Driggs's cold? I've been meaning to go over, but I've been so busy. *Char*lotte! What *do* you think of that new standard lamp she has in the parlor? I told Joe it looked just like a boa constrictor standing on its tail, twisting round, with an old-rose silk shade hat on. Isn't it *aw*ful?"

"Why, I didn't think it was so bad as all that, Aunt

Kate. I don't believe I noticed it particularly. I had something I wanted to ask you—what was it? Oh, I know, Aunt Sarah and Carrie. You know they're ——"

"Looking for a place to board. I should say I *did* know!"

"Why don't you take them, Aunt Kate? It would be such company for you. You must be so lonely, all by yourself all day."

"Charlotte, I don't know what it is to be lonely. Each day's so full and so interesting, and I love having time to myself. I only wish I had a lot more, there are so many things I want to do. Of course I'm very, *very* fond of Aunt Sarah and poor Carrie, but I'd die if I had them right here every minute. Anyway, I'm not alone—there's Joe. Oh no, Charlotte, I couldn't, I couldn't *pos*sibly. Here comes the postman. I wonder whether he'll have a letter from that *girl*. . . . Good *morn*ing! . . . It certainly is! Thank you. *Good* morning. Advertisement—post card for Joe from A. B. Who's A. B.? Whoever it is, wouldn't you think he could find something more interesting in California than an empty band stand? Yes! Here it is! Look, Charlotte! That's from that girl!"

Kate held out Evelyn's letter, as gingerly as if it had been a frog.

"You know sometimes I almost think he's getting over it. He doesn't seem unhappy, and he likes to do things—take me out in the Ford, and go to the movies

—and he certainly hasn't lost his appetite. You wouldn't believe me if I told you how many popovers he ate last night for supper. I must say they were delicious. But he's awfully thin—haven't you noticed?"

"Why, no, he looks just about the same as usual to me."

"Well, he doesn't to me; he makes my heart *ache*. Of course he's working terribly hard; that may have something to do with it."

She looked at him anxiously that evening, and then turned back relieved to the lamp shade she was covering. He certainly didn't look unhappy. I do believe he is getting over it, she thought.

And all the time he looked so placid, all the time his eyes, quiet behind their spectacles, read the comic strips and the prize-fight accounts, and his hand lifted a cigarette, the feeling of separation, of time going past, fell silently, like snow, on his heart. Time speeding past, time when they should have been together and that could never be lived again, time creeping until he should be with her. Sometimes he was caught between the sense of speed and slowness, as if he were crushed between two turning stones. By day he worked feverishly; at night his tired mind went round in its circle. He knew no peace; he was stretched taut with living. Life had become a series of tense waitings for the mail; nothing was any comfort except her letters to him, the letters to her that he wrote late into the night.

"See, Joe, I think this lamp shade's going to be all right. Don't you? I thought maybe the yellow was too lemony, but it doesn't look so bad with the light shining through, does it? Look! Anyway, it was all they had at Small's. What do you think?"

"Yes," said Joe, warmly, looking through the lamp shade, through Kate, with starry eyes. He wanted to talk about Evelyn, just to speak her name, but he couldn't begin.

He's always moony when he's had a letter, Kate thought, picking up snips of silk from the floor. What in the world is in all those wonderful letters? I wish he'd talk about her to me, but I suppose I'm not worthy. Hmp!

Joe picked up a magazine, but instead of opening it he dreamily began to draw spectacles and a mustache on the lovely lady on the cover. With his eyes on the pencil, he said:

"Evelyn wrote ——"

But Kate in a panic jumped up to fix the fire, clashing and crashing the fire irons.

Mrs. Prather poured herself another glass of Cointreau and dashed it down, crushed out a cigarette, popped a large liqueur chocolate into one cheek, and through it said, thickly and loudly:

"Bridge."

"You four play, and Evelyn and I will yawn together in the corner."

The footman had set out the card table, and Mrs. Prather, Mrs. Thorne, Cyril Wolfe, and Count Santarelli settled themselves around it, while Ralph Levinson and Evelyn sank into a deep sofa before a small fire in a carved stone fireplace at the other end of the room. The curtains of faded crimson brocade were looped back from the long windows. They could see the lights on the Grand Canal, the quivering reflections, and a grand-opera moon in the sky. Dinner had been delicious. Ralph was at his best as a host, paying the women subtle yet definite compliments; talking horses with Santarelli, who was a star in the Italian cavalry; explaining to Cyril Wolfe why he preferred the paintings of Toulouse-Lautrec to those of Renoir; discussing foreign finance with that hard-headed woman, Mrs. Prather; giving a servant an order in fluent Italian. How different he and Joe are, Evelyn had thought, lifting a spoonful of beaten cream and wine, putting it down because it was so fattening, and then thinking, oh, well! and eating it.

A letter had come from Joe that morning. "I was out in the wind all afternoon," he wrote. "I thought of you and I ran and jumped over fences. The wind was stripping the maples; sometimes the road was a running river of scarlet and pale pink leaves."

The wind blew through the room as she thought of him, but it did not bend the candle flames or stir the mimosa.

Now she was comfortable and relaxed; she felt beautiful; the short full skirt of her black gown billowed on the crimson brocade; she idly admired her white hand, lying among the folds. Ralph admired it, too, and covered it with his own.

She smiled at him. "Unhand me, villain. You know I'm another's."

"I know it amuses you to say so."

The dim light in the room, yellow and thick as honey, showed a tapestry of white unicorns in the forest, sea-water-colored glass jars of calla lilies, pouring smooth and creamy from smooth green stems, and an Epstein statuette of a big-bellied small-headed woman, repulsive and fascinating. Mrs. Prather's tight flesh-colored chiffon gown gave a curious effect. "Venus arising from the card table," Ralph murmured. Cyril Wolfe's monocle flashed in the spurt of a match; Mrs. Thorne's delicate eyebrows drew together in a frown; her upper lip lengthened like a monkey's as she took advantage of being dummy to peer into the mirror of her vanity case and put fresh scarlet on her mouth.

Evelyn knew she would have been engaged to Ralph now if she hadn't inconveniently fallen in love with Joe. Comfort and beauty would have been hers, Ralph's dark and silken love-making would have been hers. She was fascinated and excited by him; she grew light-headed on his admiration, his intuitive Oriental understanding. She could always depend on him not to miss the subtlest shade as they mocked the others

in intimate murmurs. She felt almost indignant with Joe. He couldn't keep her for himself, yet he kept her from everyone else. If this is being engaged, I don't like it, she thought. But in a minute Ralph was making her laugh by mimicking Mrs. Prather's severe reprimands to poor little Santarelli, who was almost weeping. She lay back among silk cushions, laughing, too comfortable to lift the lighted cigarette between her fingers, warmly shut within the moment.

But going home in Ralph's gondola, poled through liquid silver by his gondoliers with their apple-green sashes and apple-green ribbons fluttering from the sailor hats little girls used to wear in the 'eighties, she was overwhelmed by a rush of feeling for Joe. She thought of another sentence from his letter:

"I love you so that it must make atonement to you for everything."

When Mrs. Thorne was asleep Evelyn went into the bathroom with pad and pencil and wrote to him.

"Joe, I'm terrified! This separation terrifies me! I don't want a beautiful dream, or to be made finer and stronger through patient waiting, or anything like that; I want to be yours now. I'm sick with fright at time and distance. Oh, Joe, my darling, take me and keep me, before it's too late."

Her letter was carried across the sea to the Westlake post office. In Mr. James Perkins' mail bag it went to 29 Chestnut Street, where Kate was dusting the hall.

"*Good* morning, Mrs. Green. Looks like summer's really over, don't it?"

The first snow fell on the dry ground and dead leaves with a hissing sound, a tiny rattling. The summer that had been so happy, after all, was gone. She had dreaded it, and it had been the most beautiful one she had ever known. She thought of times with Joe—always with Joe. The day he took her to Small's to buy a hat, and had been so funny that Miss Minnie had had a stitch in her side from laughing. The hot day when everything went wrong, and she tipped over the blackberry jam and scalded her hand, and then Joe came home and took her to Tetwillow's Pond, with a picnic supper. Bells sounded faintly from the distant church; lily pads lay flat and cool on water stained pink by sunset; shadowy fish swam near the shore, silent as thoughts. The day they had been out driving in the Ford, and she had cried: "Joe! What *is* all that yellow?" and they had seen the multitudes of butterflies, their wings folded, blown sideways by the wind as they clung to the edges of the ruts in the road, then rising in a quivering cloud of clear color that brought tears of pure happiness to her eyes.

With a start she shut the door. *Crazy!* Standing there in the snow! Her smile faded; she looked at the letter in her hand, wrinkling up her nose. How could Joe recover if that girl kept on writing all the time? What on earth did they find to write so much about? "Venezia." What an affected postmark! Why not

just say "Venice," simply and naturally? She propped it up against the hall lamp and went on dusting, but she had to keep turning her head to look at it, and once she childishly put out the tip of her tongue.

They had finished supper and Joe was in his room when Mr. Porter telephoned him. Kate shouted up the stairs.

"Joe-ho! Telephone!"

"I've got to go over to Mr. Porter's right away," he told her, shrugging into his overcoat. "He's going to New York on the night train, and he wants to tell me some things before he goes. 'By!"

"Good-by, darling. Be careful not to skid!" Kate called to the slamming door, and went upstairs for her darning basket.

Of course the careless boy had left his light on. She went in to turn it off, and saw lying on the desk under it Evelyn's letter, and the answer Joe had begun in his clear black writing.

Shuddering, ice-cold, sick with shame, she lay face down on her bed. Why had she done it? Why had she done it? The words leaped at her again.

"I'm trying with all my might to earn enough for us and for mother too. I know you understand about her, and I bless you for it, my darling. Somehow we must be together. I can't bear the torture of another summer like this empty one that was meant for you ——"

She rolled over, pushing her hair up from her forehead with shaking hands. She who had always been so honest, she who had always felt such scorn for poking and prying ——

Oh, the comfort if she could ask him to forgive her as he had once confessed and asked to be forgiven when he was little.

"I'm trying—to earn enough for us and for mother too. I know you understand about her ——"

Oh, Joe, how could you, how *could* you, to a stranger?

"—the torture of another summer like this empty one ——"

The summer that had been bliss to her and torture to her child.

Well, summer is over. The leaves of the trees are brighter than ever before—but bright with vermilion and yellow; they fall ——

She heard the doorbell ringing. Joe had forgotten his key again. She ran into the bathroom and washed her eyes with cold water, tipped some of his talcum powder into her hand and dipped in her nose, turning it into a mulberry. Then down to the door. And there was J. Hartley Harrison. She simply couldn't say anything, but Hartley could.

"*Good* evening, Mrs. Green! How's the lady? May I come in for a little visit with you? . . . Thanks. I don't want to get snow on that very pretty chintz of yours. Funny, Aunt Martha Ellsworth, dad's

sister, you know, over at Green Falls, has exactly the same pattern for her living-room curtains. Perhaps that's why this place always feels so homey to me, if any reason is needed beside your gracious welcome, Lady Green! But what I was going to ask was if I might trouble you for a whisk. . . . Thanks! I think I'll just take my rubbers off; then we can visit more comfortably. I'm combining business and pleasure to-night, Mrs. Green; I'm here to tell you a little about the new gymnasium equipment we're after for the Y ——"

"Well, I'm afraid ——"

"No obligations, Mrs. Green, no obligations. I just want to tell you about it. Come close to the fire, Mrs. Green; have the easy-chair. Comfy? What a dear photograph of Charlotte's kiddies! Very sweet indeed. I suppose Joe will be leaving the ranks of us gay bachelors soon?"

"Yes."

He could see that she had been crying, but he was tremendously tactful. Saying "Pardon me," he folded his nose in his nice monogrammed handkerchief, gift of Aunt Martha, and pretended to blow.

"I see we're fellow victims, Mrs. Green—these head colds! The motherkin has a mean one. Well, about that gym equipment ——"

I must give up Joe, utterly, utterly. I must be glad to let him go; I must care more for him than for myself. I must help my child.

"Of course one has to adopt different methods in presenting the case. Now suppose I was tackling another fellow. We'd just have it out, man to man. 'Smith, old fellow'—of course Smith is just a fictitious name —'Smith, old fellow, how about coming across for the Y?' 'Surest thing you know, Harrison!' 'Put it there, Smith!' But that wouldn't go with the ladies—I should say not! I find the only way of telling the ladies about it is to let *them* tell *me!* You'll pardon my having a little joke at the expense of the fair sex, Mrs. Green? You know it's hats off to every one of them with me, God bless them, but the way they love to talk just tickles my sense of humor. I always have to chuckle at that delicious story of the man who hadn't spoken to his wife in ten years because he said he didn't want to interrupt her!"

"I ——"

"So I just let the ladies do the talking. Let! That's rich! I guess there's not much *let* about it! Well, as I was saying ——"

I must help my child. But how? And will it be helping him, really? She's not the girl for him. He'll get over it if he only has time ——

"Miss Pyne tells us she and Mrs. Whipple are looking for a nice boarding place. The little mother was thinking of suggesting Cousin Gerty and Cousin Will White's; they'd be just the ones to make them fit right in and feel like home folks. Mrs. Whipple's wonder-

ful for her age, isn't she? Ninety-four, I understand. A dear little old lady ——"

I must love Joe enough to let him go.

She sat by her window all night, looking out at the falling snow, not seeing it. Hartley Harrison had told her what she must do, though he would never know. She opened her hands and let Joe go; she tore the hope of his return utterly out of her heart. Dawn showed her gray and old, wrapped in her rosy eiderdown. The tears that had swollen her eyes had been dry for hours. She sat there with no thought, just broken feeling, until the gate clicked behind Effa and Joe's bath water roared in the tub.

"Joe, do you think there's any chance of your getting married soon?" she asked him that night. "You see, I really am lonely, here by myself all day, and I was thinking I might take Aunt Sarah and Carrie in if I had the studio. They're going to give up housekeeping, anyway, and they're crazy to come here, and I'd love to have them; it would be such company for me. And then what they paid would help out so that you could keep your millions for starting in yourself, you and Evelyn. I don't want to hurry you, only it *will* have to be settled pretty soon, because they have an offer for the house."

He looked so happy he made her want to cry. Even his spectacles shone.

Chapter Eighteen

KATE felt, when she jumped from sleep at the alarm clock's ringing, that the tide had turned, that life was coming back to her. The air brought a smell of spring, of manure, wet earth, through the open window. It had rained in the night, but the sun was shining now. Each bud on the maple trees looked as if water was welling from it, wet branches were netted against a robin's-egg-blue sky. She loved the cold water she dashed on her face, the smell of coffee coming up the stairs; she whistled fuzzily, with much breath and little sound, as she pulled on her stockings.

After that night when she had realized she was not first in the world to anyone, the night she had opened her hands and let her darling go, she thought everything had left her. She helped Joe pack; she got ready for Aunt Sarah and Carrie; she soothed disapproving Effa. Heavy with lassitude, she dragged through days full of duties—empty days ——

And to-day life was coming back to her, flooding her, lifting her up.

"5 l chops
amonnia ammonia amonia
½ pk spin
pk mac
5 gran sug"

she wrote on the back of Edith Roberts' wedding invitation after breakfast. "Could you make a rice pudding for lunch, Effa?" Gone were the days when she could have tea and lettuce and bread and butter, happy and alone with a book spread open by her plate. "And remember Mrs. Whipple likes lots of raisins in it—how any one *can!*"

"You need tea."

"Why, I got some on Saturday!"

"There's plenty of your kind, but Mis' Whipple won't drink that."

"Oh dear! So she won't. All right."

"Knock, knock, knock!" Carrie lilted from the door. "Tan I tum in? Effa, I wouldn't be in your way if I put some water on to heat, would I? I just thought I'd Twink my old cream waist periwinkle; it looks kind of horrid since I spilled hot chocolate on it at the Wednesday Club."

"Why don't you wait till this afternoon?" Kate suggested, looking apprehensively at Effa's glum expression.

"Tause I want to wear it dis afternoon, lady fair, *dat's* why! Dood reason? Now you just run along. Effa and I understand each other, don't we, Ef—Oh, *mercy!*"

Pots and pans crashed to the floor.

"Me's werry naughty dirl! Me didn't *doe* for to do it! Boo-hoo! Boo-hoo!"

Carrie just about embarrasses me to death when she acts this way. What's the matter with her? She's been sort of light-headed ever since she's been here.

"What do you want, Carrie?"

"A pot for my Twink—this'll do."

"That's the stock pot, Miss Carrie; I gotta have it for soup. Here."

"Thank you muchly!"

Well, I only hope and pray Effa can stand it, Kate thought, stooping in the sunny parlor window to pick up a banana skin that Benjie had dropped. Where was that bird? She looked around cautiously, and then jumped as he suddenly screamed from the top of the piano. Horrid thing! No wonder he nearly drove Carrie crazy, following her all over the house and nipping at her ankles.

Some one had been at the box of chocolates Hoagland had given her; the lace paper edge stuck out from under the lid. Aunt Sarah again, biting into the different kinds and putting back halves she didn't like. Poor old thing, she really isn't responsible, Kate thought, but her nose wrinkled in disgust as she fished out two half pistachios and one nougat that had proved too hard for anything but mangling. She popped the last chocolate marshmallow into her mouth, to make sure of it. Candy at ten o'clock in the morning! How dreadful! How delicious!

"Kate!"

"Yes, Aunt Sarah!"

"Kate! *Kate!*"

"Yes!"

"It's very cold in the house."

She was always cold, even when heat was puffing up through the scroll-work registers.

"Oh *no*, Aunt Sarah; it's almost like summer to-day."

"I'm very cold."

"All right. I'll fill the oil stove and bring it up to your room."

The studio was Aunt Sarah's room now, crowded with furniture she had saved from Cedarmere. She kept the skylight covered; the curtains were drawn for fear of draughts. So warm, so dark, so over-full; she had gone into it like a burrowing animal into a warm hole full of feathers and dead grass and nutshells. But she wasn't there now. Kate tried the bathroom door, and found it locked. Aunt Sarah laughed soundlessly to herself as the knob turned. She loved the bathroom, not for baths, which she considered weakening, but for quiet and meditation. Here was the one place nobody could get at her to suggest that she do anything she didn't want to.

Oh, *bother!* Kate thought, putting on her hat. Gloves, purse, my letter to Joe; I'm afraid that's overweight—but I must try to be patient, she's so old. Oh, bother the telephone!

"Hello! . . . No—this is 172, party *J*. . . . Dear

me! Please excuse me for living! Carrie, I've just insulted somebody by having the wrong number."

"But, Kate, how could they blame ——?"

She laughed suddenly, happily, and gave Carrie's arm a squeeze. Poor old goose, she couldn't help loving her.

Delicious air! The grass was getting quite green. "Hello, Hatty Butterfield! Isn't this a heavenly morning?"

"Oh, Kate! Good morning! Do tell me, any news of the honeymooners I could use?"

"They're in the south of France just now. I was just taking this letter down to mail to Joe."

"*My!* what a fat one! Do you mind if I copy the address? Villa Miramare ——"

That would look well on the Sunday society page.

"They're coming home the first of May, and they're going to visit me until they find a house."

"But, Kate, how can you have them, with Mrs. Whipple and Carrie?"

"Oh, I can manage."

"Really, Kate, I sometimes think your wings must be beginning to sprout, the way you act with Mrs. Whipple—not that I don't mean she isn't a lovely old lady ——"

"*Non*sense, Hatty!" laughed Kate. She was making real self-sacrifices; it was sweet to be loved and admired for them. So many people had said, "How lovely for you to have Mrs. Whipple and Miss Pyne;

they must be such company for you!" She walked lightly on to the butcher's, the grocer's—a banana for Benjie, because she was almost happy again.

"Good morning, Mrs. Roberts. I haven't seen you since Edith's wedding, to tell you how *love*ly it was! Where did they go? Oh—Washington— Good morning, Mrs. Harrison; that's very nice, isn't it? And those famous cherry trees ought to be in bloom now, oughtn't they? My two are in the south of France just now. Aren't they the lucky children? They write me that everything's in bloom, almond trees and *sheets* of forget-me-nots, and it's warm enough for bathing. Evelyn's very much at home in France, she's lived abroad so much, and Joe was there during the war, of course."

"Really, the way Mrs. Green's going on about Joe and his wife makes me *smile*," Mrs. Roberts said, bitterly, to Mrs. Harrison. "I guess no one in Westlake's been allowed to forget that they're in France! Amusing! . . . Mr. Turben, have you any eatable potato chips? Those last were just plain soggy ——"

I believe I *will* have the parlor papered, Kate thought, pausing before the New Art Company's shop, with its three samples of wall paper in the window, a satin stripe with a cut-out frieze of wistaria, a brown imitation leather with a frieze of grapes, and the pattern of Little Bo-Peep and Little Boy Blue that Charlotte had in her nursery. I can do it all right if I make over my old voile and put off getting a new lawn

mower. I want the house to make a good impression on Evelyn.

And she went in and sat before samples of red cabbage roses, imitation tapestry, birds of paradise, flapped over by Mr. Holmquist.

"Wait—that last one was pretty—those sea gulls."

"That's for bathrooms only."

"Oh! No—no—yes, I know, they're *very* nice, only not just exactly what I was thinking of."

"If you could sort of tell me what you *were* thinking of, Mrs. Green?"

"Well, I really haven't the least idea."

"Here's one in excellent taste." He displayed oatmeal paper, dull as dishwater.

"No, not quite. Perhaps I don't want paper at all. I've often thought I'd like to panel the parlor white, and have orange curtains."

But she knew she never would. Everything new had to be dull browns and greens so that everything else wouldn't look too old and shabby for anything.

A pile of mail waited on the hall table, and her heart jumped as she looked for a letter from Joe. But there was none. "Oh, well," she thought. "Perhaps to-morrow morning ——"

"Hurry *yup*, Joe! Dinner'll be over!"

"I can't bust into tears because of that; I know too well what it's going to be. Hard potatoes, fish bones ——"

"*Veal!*"

"String beans ——"

"Soft custard ——"

"And paper-weight peaches of beautiful green marble. Aren't you dressed?"

"Practically. I have on my chemise and my earrings. Oh, Joe, wasn't it a *heav*enly walk?"

"Swell. Do you want this mass of dead vegetation you've put in the bowl, or can I wash my face?"

"Oh, are they all dead? They were such pretty wildflowers. Throw them away. I loved them when I picked them."

The personally conducted party from Manchester was having a musical evening in the lounge of the Villa Miramare when Joe and Evelyn came out for coffee after dinner. A contralto was singing about a weary heart as if her mouth were full of mashed potato. "Evelyn, you mustn't laugh," Joe whispered, severely. Then there was a sea song from a small elderly man in alpaca.

"I ought to write to mother to-night."

But he sat where he was, sleepy from the long walk, smiling at Evelyn through cigarette smoke, too contented to move.

"Joe, did you ever see such dancing?"

The couples hopped about, continually talking in their difficult ugly voices. "Eough, I sye!" "Eough, *fahn*cy!" "Eough, I sye, Gwen, down't stop ply-ing —I do call thet jolly unkahnd!" The young ladies

were in bunchy taffetas, with handkerchiefs stuck into their armlets, and underwear straps hanging down. One sat alone, with a supercilious expression, and called out to a man hurrying past:

"Mr. Wallace. I rahther fahncy I shall just drop out of the saight-seeing excursion to-morrow."

"Much Mr. Wallace cares!" said Evelyn to Joe. "Poor thing."

"Evelyn! My Gawd! Look, isn't this a new lot?"

More tourists, in tweeds instead of taffetas, were being led about by a friend who had gotten there first. Eager, excited, important, he was insisting on showing the others the grandeurs of the *pension*. "But wyte! You 'aven't seen the dahning room yet!" And the flock was forced reluctantly to look at the dining room.

"Evelyn! *Naughty!* You mustn't laugh at people right in front of them! Oh, gosh! I meant to write to mother to-night."

"That's all you've said all evening. Joe! Be careful! You'll dislocate your jaw!"

"I'm too sleepy to-night. I'll write to-morrow morning."

He opened the shutters of the long French windows and stepped out on a balcony made of a scrap of lettuce-green iron lace. Warm sunlight flooded him as he looked down at the personally conducted party squeezing into a char-à-bancs and amusing an old

woman wearing a hat like a mother pancake carrying its baby pancake on its back, who stopped beating a gray mouse of a donkey with panniers full of cabbages in order to have a good laugh. And then they were off along the road that was like a road through the sky, running above silver-gray clouds, the tops of olive trees, falling away to a still sea of intense purple blue that held other clouds, clear-colored clouds of peacock blue and turquoise.

"Joe, come to breakfast!"

Sunlight poured into the room. Their big bed under its net was like a white waterfall. On a table covered with a cloth in checks of pink and pale pink was the breakfast tray, edged with Evelyn's shade hat, a package of cigarettes, some books, and a drinking glass holding a spray of lemon blossoms, as a glacier is edged with rocks it has pushed before it. On the tray lay Kate's fat letter, straining the seams of its white waistcoat.

"Isn't it wonderful how they enamel these cast-iron rolls to look like real ones? Have some honey?"

He watched the thick gold thread spread into a pool, spin thin.

"Let's go in bathing in that cove we found."

"Let's! More coffee, Joey? *Joe*-y! I'm speaking to you!"

He kissed the inside of her outstretched arm; with a groan he pressed his closed eyes against it. Kate's letter was knocked to the floor and lay there unnoticed.

"They're due to-morrow!"

The paperers were gone. The parlor really did look nice; it was worth the expense and the trouble, and the complaints about strange men in the house and the smell of paint that had gone on in Aunt Sarah's feeble old voice that always seemed about to die away, but never did, quite. Carrie had been moved into a curtained corner of the studio; Kate herself was in Carrie's little room. Her own room was ready for the children, fresh paper in bureau drawers, freshly washed curtains billowing in the windows.

"You'd a right to take a little rest," Effa told her.

"I can't, Effa. I have an awful headache, but I can't seem to keep still."

"You're nervous. *I* don't blame you. Looky, you sit down here and I'll make you a nice hot cup-a tea; it'll do you good."

"It *would* be nice. Oh, Effa! I feel so queer!"

"There! An' here's a nice piece-a cawfee cake. You didn't eat no lunch at all."

"That does make me feel better. Do you know, I think I'll send them a telegram to welcome them. I could just telephone it to the office, couldn't I? Mr. Joe wrote they'd stay over one night in New York."

So she telephoned. "Mr. J. M. Green, Jr.—oh, wait a minute, Mr. and *Mrs.* J. M. Green, Jr. . . . J for giraffe—no, no, I mean for jelly. M for mignonette—not minuet, mignonette. . . . Oh, well, it's the same thing. . . . I say all right, minuet. . . .

Yes—G for giraffe; r. . . . Yes, rrr—double e—n—Green, the color. . . . That's right. . . . Welcome. . . . I beg your pardon? . . . Oh yes, Biltmore—b for baby ——"

"Yes?" Carrie called, coming in the front door.

"Nothing! Biltmore. . . . Oh, you have it. . . . I'm *telephoning*. . . . Hotel, New York. Welcome. . . . Yes—welcome home—love—l-o-v-e—Mother."

"We're due to-morrow."

Darkness lay under the surge of waves, the smother of foam, ageless and indifferent. Yet it held, lightly rocking in its hand, all the little ships, men in yellow oilskins, the other set of men in blue with gold braid, pots of jam, swaying artificial palms, cockroaches waving nervous feelers, swinging rows of teacups on their hooks, homesick cabin boys, Joe and Evelyn turning to each other in the warm lighted cabin. There they swung, washed over by the waves of that other ocean of the air, upheld toward heaven by dark desolation.

Chapter Nineteen

"KATE! You're wanted on the 'phone!"

'Phone! Why couldn't Carrie say telephone?

"Who is it, Carrie? I'm right in the middle of my mayonnaise."

"It's Charlotte. Hoagland wants to know whether he should wear his Tuxedo to-night?"

"Tell her no; we're not going to dress up. Carrie! Wait a minute—I'll just have to speak to her. . . . Hello, Charlotte!"

"Oh, Aunt Kate, Hoagland ——"

"We're not going to dress up—at least, I'm just going to wear my blue. Charlotte ——"

"Sonny Boy, let pussy alone! Let her alone, lover! . . . Yes, Aunt Kate? I'm listening, I was just . . . Sonny Boy Driggs, did you hear what mother said?"

"Charlotte, they're here!"

"Are they? Well, that's nice."

"Oh, Charlotte, come *early*!"

It was too queer to hear them moving about in her room, to hear a sudden burst of soft laughter. Her hands shook as she brushed her hair. Usually she rolled it up, pushed in three shell hairpins, and let it go, but to-night she was so nervous she used two packages of invisible hairpins beside.

She had been putting the finishing touches to the bathroom, the best towels embroidered with fat K. S. G.'s and the Christmas-present soap still in its violet wrapper, when they got out of the taxi. She would have done it sooner, but Aunt Sarah had locked herself in for nearly an hour. Kate stood there pressing *savon de violette* against her heart, looking down at Evelyn waiting for Joe to pay O'Leary's man, their bags, bright with foreign labels, piled beside her. Exquisite, poised, in a dark-purple hat like a petunia, and a close dark-purple coat, her face framed in a soft fluff of fur, slender wrists in softly wrinkled creamy suède, slender ankles in flesh-colored silk, she made Kate's knees tremble so that she could hardly get downstairs to let them in.

And now they were sitting around the table, eating the kaleidoscope patterns of green pepper and pimento and hard-boiled egg on anchovy canapés. Effa came in, wearing her nice black dress and white apron, and those awful pearl beads; too late for Kate to speak to her about them. And it was just like Joe to say: "Hello, Effa! How are you?" and of course she had to answer: "Hello, Joe! Just fine and dandy, thank you. How's yourself?" right in front of that girl!

Small painted flowers bloomed through the soup, and the plates were taken away.

"What's your little girl's name?"

"Why, *Joe!* Haven't you told Evelyn *that?* Well, you're a *nice* one! It's really Anna Louise, for the two

grandmas, but we call her Nancy Lou. . . . Yes, *we* think it's dear."

"You'll see the youngsters when you come over to-morrow night," Hoagland promised.

"Oh, Evelyn, they're just the darlingest kiddies that ever were: you'll *simp*ly adore them!" Carrie sang.

"The boy's a regular feller, I'll tell the world!"

"Tell Evelyn that *pre*cious thing he said."

"I don't just know what you mean, Carrie."

"*You* know—about not being a girl?"

"Oh yes! He and Nancy Lou were playing on the lawn in their overalls, and Miss Violetta Mortimer ——"

"Miss Heloise, dear."

"What?"

"It doesn't matter. It simply happened to be Miss Heloise, but it doesn't make any difference."

"Well, anyway, whichever Mortimer girl it was said, 'Well, two little boys, I see!' "

"Because Nancy Lou had on her overalls ——"

"But Sonny Boy wasn't going to stand for anything like that; he said, 'I'm a boy, but she's a girl.' "

"That wasn't ex*act*ly it, dear."

"All right, you tell it."

"It was practically it, only what Sonny Boy said was, 'I's a boy, but Nancy Lou's nuffin but a 'ittle dirl!' "

"Ah-h!" groaned Carrie, tenderly.

There were olives and salted almonds, because it

was a party. Part of Kate's mind was in the kitchen, pouring on the salad dressing at the last minute; part was watching Aunt Sarah, absorbed in her food, wrinkled and tiny, eating something up close, like a monkey eating a nut. Her foot felt about under the table for the bell.

Joe wanted them to love Evelyn; he tried to bridge the space between them. It was touching to his mother to see him simple, like a little boy again, after the months he had hidden away from her. She tried to be simple, too. I *will* love her, I *will*, no matter how I feel. Oh, Joe, why *did* you marry her?

"Shall we have our coffee in the living room?"

"Mother, I never knew anything so stylish as you're being!"

Joe made her so mad sometimes!

They sat making conversation.

"That's not a very comfortable chair, I'm afraid, Charlotte."

"Oh, it's very nice, thank you, Aunt Kate."

"What are you making, dear?"

"Just some little bluebird for happiness aprons for the hospital fair. Marcia Quackenbush has the apron table, and I said I'd help her out. I think these little afternoon-tea aprons are awfully sweet, although I can't imagine anyone ever wearing one; still, they're nice to give away. There're some darling ones in pastel colors, with baskets of flowers appliquéd, even prettier than these, I think."

"I thought you were cake."

"I am, but Marcia was simply distracted. She brought these over with the bluebirds all cut out and everything and said she was *near*ly out of her mind, so I said I'd help her out, though goodness knows I really haven't the time. I mean, with the cake table and getting the children's summer clothes ready and all."

"You'll find we all lead very busy lives, Evelyn."

Evelyn sat there, warm, humid, faintly fragrant, in dim-pink chiffon edged with fronds of uncurled ostrich, smoking cigarette after cigarette, the full sleeves falling back from her white arms, the twilight-colored feathers floating, stirring. She made Kate in her nice blue silk and her beaded slippers, with her eau de Cologne, and Charlotte in her henna crêpe de Chine (the real Paris model—Miss Gilhooley had brought it over herself), her kinky permanent wave, and the diamond-and-sapphire bar pin Hoagland had given her for having Nancy Lou, the diamond wrist watch for having Sonny Boy, feel heavy and solid—feel that they were just good respectable women.

"I think I'll have a cigarette, Joe," said Charlotte, with a defiant look at Hoagland.

"Try my kind. Mr. Driggs?"

"Oh, now, you mustn't call me Mr. Driggs. Thanks, I never smoke anything but cigars."

"No, Hoagland never smokes cigarettes," Charlotte corroborated him between rapid jerky puffs.

"People often think I disapprove of women smok-

ing because I don't smoke myself," Carrie contributed. "But I always say no, *I* don't smoke, simply because I never *have*, but I don't disapprove at *all*."

Kate slipped upstairs to turn down their bed, and put out the cobweb nightgown and soft blue silk kimona with plum blossoms drifting across its sky, so fragrant. And Joe's old washed-out pajamas. Goodness! Why hadn't he gotten some new? *That girl*, to see him in those old things, with the bright unfaded patch!

"People who never drank before are drinking since prohibition," Hoagland was announcing when she came downstairs. "Now in my opinion light wines and beer ——"

"Oh, Joe! A moth!"

"Where?"

"There—no—Evelyn! By you!"

She dashed forward, clapping.

"Mother, you're as good as Pavlowa, only you ought to be in a cheese-cloth nightie."

It was her one moment of naturalness, of honest passion, in the whole tense evening. Only Joe seemed natural. Evelyn, bored and depressed to exhaustion, felt shut away from him. She had married a stranger who was her only friend.

Joe married. Jodie Green married. I can't make it seem true, Kate thought. Where were the children? Charlotte, good and serious, putting her pennies into the little iron house, and eating each Easter's choco-

late-cream egg so slowly that it would be a month before she came to the ultimate string. Jodie's never lasted at all; he never could wait; and then he would give other boys licks, and even old Shep—she couldn't stop him! Wild, red-cheeked, red-nosed little Jodie, coming tearing in all snow, mittens lost, though she'd sewn them on a tape and run it through his coat sleeves; little hands red, wet with snow, cold and stiff as a bird's claws. She could feel them now. Charlotte starting off to school with her pencil box like a row of books, a pretty red maple leaf for painting, an extra pear for Miss Miller. Jodie milking his tricycle —it had been a cow for one whole winter—Jodie getting his fingers caught in the clothes wringer. Gone, as if they had been two children made of snow.

"Well, Charlotte, I think ——"

"Yes, dear, I was just thinking myself. Well, Aunt Kate, we've had a delightful evening."

Kate and Evelyn and Joe went out on the porch to say good night to them. It had begun to rain. There was the sound of the rain entering the earth, the smell of wet leaves and wet earth. The spring night was full of the up-pushing and overflow of life, green jets breaking up from beneath the surface, fecundity and hard resistless passion of new life.

"Why, where's the car?"

"We walked. Hoagland hasn't been getting enough exercise."

"No, I haven't been getting enough air and exercise."

"But, Charlotte! Your thin slippers! Don't you want to call up O'Leary for a taxi? Well, then, you must take my slips, if you can keep them on."

"Why, Aunt Kate, you have little bits of feet! You'd better say if I can *get* them on!"

Dear Charlotte!

In a sudden gust of affection, of longing for sympathy, Kate seized her wrist in a hot tense hand and whispered: "Wasn't it awful, that *Effa* put the sweetened whipped cream for the dessert on the tomato soup! I was never so mortified in my entire life!"

"Now I never noticed it at all, Aunt Kate. Don't you worry; everything was simply delicious!"

And Charlotte felt a sudden warm gushing out toward her aunt, a feeling of wanting to protect, of wanting to be protected.

"Oh, you have an umbrella, Hoagland!"

"Yes, I thought it looked like rain when we started out."

"Well, I guess the gardens need it."

"We'll look for you good people to-morrow night at half past six. You see we're not stylish; just family dinner; we're not going to make company of you."

"Why not?" Joe asked.

Evelyn had felt separated from Joe all evening. But now, together again, they were swelling toward

each other, aching for each other savagely, her body yielding to his passionately and exultantly, aching for more pain, not for tenderness, quivering and alive, going past feeling to inexpressible completeness.

"Evelyn! We should have died!"

The waves withdrew, sounding faint and far, turning into the rain, the wind in wet leaves. The unbearable beauty of white radiance flowed into darkness, depth beneath depth of gentle darkness.

Effa thought she heard her sick puppy crying, so she put on her old blanket wrapper and took the lamp down to the woodshed to see how he was. He welcomed her with a feeble flop of his tail; his sad eyes looked dimly and imploringly at her; his nose pushed into her hand. She huddled there with the heavy silky body across her knees. She could smell the wet lilacs outside the shed; they made her chest feel queer, as if something was stuck there. She wanted, she wanted ——! She didn't know what she wanted. Yes, she did, too: she wanted a fellow, and much chance she had of ever getting one, with her fat clumsy body and homely face, always cutting up and making a joke of herself first, before other people could. She wanted a fellow to look at her the way Joe Green looked at that girl. And she'd live and die an old maid, "more fun than a circus." Tears ran down her red face and into her wide-stretched mouth, bitter as drops from the depths of the sea.

Charlotte thought she heard a noise from the children's room, and went in to see if they were all right. There they lay, safe, relaxed, silky lashes lying on moist pink cheeks, so near to her, so unreachably far away. The babies were growing up. The sorrow of birth that leads to death flooded her, though she had no words for it.

"All right, honey?"

"Hoagland Driggs, you scared me to death! Why aren't you asleep?"

He couldn't say, "Because I was thinking of Opal Mendoza." He asked her:

"Why aren't you?"

"I don't know. I got to feeling sort of blue ——"

"Why, everything's all right, Charlotte. Isn't it?"

"Oh, I guess so."

"Maybe you ate something," he suggested, sympathetically and anxiously.

"Maybe. Aunt Kate always has things so nice. Or maybe it was the coffee." She laid his hand against her cheek for a moment, gently. "Well ——"

Carrie turned from side to side. If only she could get to sleep. But it was so stuffy. She crept to a window and raised it a little way, waking Aunt Sarah.

"Carrie! Put that window down! It blows right on me."

Carrie shut out the spring and went back to bed, crying a little and wondering whether she could fix

over her taupe chiffon to look like Evelyn's dress. She had some marabou edging—dirty white, but perhaps she could dye it. She must ask Evelyn what that perfume was.

The wind had risen. Kate thought it might be driving the rain in on the porch chairs and wetting their cushions. So she put on her flannelette wrapper and went down and out on the porch, and tipped the chairs against the wall, back up. And then, because she was downstairs, she went to see if Effa had shut the icebox. Almost all the charlotte russe gone, and there had been more than half left. Effa must have *stuffed;* no wonder she was so fat. That girl hadn't a thought in her head beyond laughing and eating. And the mayonnaise in the best luster bowl! But as she squatted there in her flannelette wrapper, with her hair in a little gray wisp of pigtail, looking fixedly into the refrigerator, she didn't give a hang for anything in it, really, or anything out of it. For her tulips, that were blooming so beautifully along the path—the wet twilight-colored cups of Bleu Aimable, scarlet Mr. Farncombe Sanders, and old-rose Miss Governy bowing under the rain—or her new brown foulard with the cream-colored dots, or the paper on "Childhood in Art" she was writing for the Wednesday Club, or even the new wall paper in the parlor. She didn't care for anything except to be young again, and have her husband back,

and not have things over. The sand fort she had built around her went down before the waves.

Only Joe and Evelyn slept, quiet and safe, her graspless hand in his, light as a leaf.

Chapter Twenty

"IT'S just pick up, pick up, pick up after her all day long," Kate said, pushing the roses into the wire holder. "Cigarette ashes *ev*erywhere. I used to think Joe was bad enough, but *Ev*elyn! And I don't believe she's ever shut a book after she's been reading it. She leaves them face down all over the house, or out on the grass under the lilac bush. Of course, I don't say anything; they're mostly Joe's, and if he doesn't care I'm sure *I* don't—but you know that certainly isn't any way to treat books!"

Charlotte glanced at her own neat rows, sets of George Eliot, Robert Louis Stevenson, Shakespeare, O. Henry, wedding-present Emerson, wedding-present Washington Irving, their backs still stiff, their pages stuck together, *The Child's Book of Knowledge*, all caged behind glass.

"No, you should use them, not abuse them."

"Look, Charlotte! If I do say so myself, this bowl is pretty sweet!"

Charlotte paused from admiration of her own floral arrangement and looked at Kate's.

"Yes, indeed, it is pretty, Aunt Kate. Thank you very much."

"Yours are *love*ly, Charlotte!"

"Oh, not as pretty as yours!"

"*Non*sense! The ones on the dining-room table are simply perfect. I do think it's sweet of you to do this for Evelyn. She would have come over to help, but Hartley Harrison came to take her to look at another house."

"I should think it would be quite a relief to you when they found one."

"It *will* be, Charlotte! Of course it'll pretty nearly break my heart to have Joe go. . . . This bottom's wet; I don't want to put it on the mahogany. Have you a cloth? . . . But he might as well not be home now as far as I see anything of him. Evelyn simply ab*sorbs* him. You know I simply *could*n't try to get him to pay attention to me, and she *does*, so naturally— *Ouch!* Those thorns are sharp! But I don't know what it's going to be like when she's keeping house, Charlotte, I certainly don't. I mean, if you could see the way their room looks—powder over everything, and her clothes anywhere, on the chairs, on the floor, any old way, and the door wide open so anyone can see. . . . Don't you think this is prettier without any asparagus? I do. . . . Still, it'll give her something to do. She seems just about bored to death all the time Joe's away, though goodness knows everyone's being as cordial as anything. I must say she hasn't been feeling very well."

"Do you think maybe ——?"

"March, April, May—I don't know. Well, if you're

sure that's all I can do I'll run along home and get dressed."

"I don't suppose Aunt Sarah'll care to come, will she?"

"Oh no, I hardly think so. Of course, she just *might* take a notion, but she hardly notices anything these days, just sits sort of whispering to herself; sometimes it makes me feel creepy. Well, Evelyn and I'll be here by four—oh, and Carrie, of course."

Carrie leaned over the stairs as Kate came in the door. Her face glistened with cold cream; her head was knobby with curling-kids.

"Hey-o, lady love! I was deddid' worried, wif bofe the ladies oud gaddid'."

"I didn't mean to stay so long, but I was helping Charlotte with the flowers. She has this ridiculous idea that no one can do them like me; it's perfectly absurd. Isn't Evelyn home yet? She ought to be."

She stepped into their empty room and began picking up snowed underclothes, blue chiffon printed with soft red poppies and scented with amber. Outlandish!

"*Look* at this dress, Carrie! And I know it's the one she intends to wear this afternoon! Well, I'll just have to press it out for her, and I simply haven't a second."

"Could'd I do id, Kade?"

"No, I'll just have to." She gave a loud, exasperated sigh. "How's your cold?"

"I thig id's bedder, thag you. I've beed sbellig

cabphor. Adyway, I'b goig; I jusd could'd *bear* to biss id. Bud loog ad by *dose*, Kade; id's as red as *fire*, ad every dibe I powder id I have do blow id agaid."

Kate banged down the ironing board, flung Evelyn's dress across it. But as the creases came smooth under the iron, her frown smoothed. She no longer felt inferior, dowdy, and unsophisticated, "old Mrs. Green." She was kind Kate, helping Evelyn.

When she carried the dress upstairs Evelyn was lying on the bed, her skirt crumpled under her, her shoes right on the nice white counterpane.

"Evelyn! Do you know what *time* it is?"

"Oh, Mrs. Green, do I have to go?"

"Why, of course! The guest of honor! We ought to be halfway there now. Don't you feel well, dear?"

She did look white; the shadows around her eyes were deeper than usual; her dark hair was pressed to her damp forehead in a way somehow touching and childlike, so that Kate suddenly, shyly, stooped and kissed her. Evelyn caught her hand.

"Mrs. Green, you've pressed my dress for me!"

"Oh, that was nothing, dear."

"You're sweet to me. Let's not go to the tea. Let's stay here and have tea in the kitchen together."

"Now hop up, goosie! Call me if you need any help."

And she went smiling to struggle into her dress—oh, bother, another hair net gone—to work her fingers into

her new white gloves, seeing herself and Evelyn girls together.

Mrs. Driggs took them in her limousine, driven by Noble in a chauffeur's cap, but no puttees. Artificial orchids quivered in a cut-glass vase; there was a clock that didn't go, an empty vinaigrette, a cigarette lighter that wouldn't light. "By, this is luxury!" Carrie sighed, trying not to blow her nose until she got to Charlotte's.

Already there were heaps of wraps on the twin beds. A three-piece orchestra was playing under the stairs. Charlotte's friends in beaded evening gowns were passing things, besides two colored waiters and Charlotte's own Winnie and Theresa. Pink tulips; pink rosebuds, some of them wilting in the heat, dropping their heads like wounded swans; long trails of asparagus fern; the sharp pink noses of the candles beginning to run; cakes in frilled paper bonnets; sandwiches rolled and tied with bows of white satin baby ribbon, like dolls' diplomas. Salad, frappé, fruit punch, everything but tea. A faint smell of gasoline from two-thirds of the town's white gloves, of coffee, dying roses, in air quivering with noise and heat. People who generally came only to weddings and funerals had come to meet Joe Green's bride. Yellowed ermine neckpieces; yellowed Roman pearls; hats high on gray pompadours; best dresses that looked as if they had been worn in the rain and then slept.in. It was hot; pulses beat fast and noses began to glisten. There was an emphasized beat

through the uproar of vague emphatic cordiality: Howda *do* why Mrs. *Rob*inson how well you're *look*-ing aren't the flowers *lov*ely have you met the *bride* isn't she at*tract*ive have you had some frap*pé* how nice to *see* you my dear it's been *a*ges aren't the flowers *lov*ely isn't she at*tract*ive so nice to have *seen* you I think a little *cof*fee I must speak to Kate *Green* well where've you been *hid*ing just a little frap*pé* isn't the bride at*tract*ive can her pearls be *real* my dear isn't it *hot* just a little frap*pé* ——

And after that the tidal wave of parties broke over Evelyn. Lunches where young mothers talked about Dicky being an absolute *an*gel, but Patricia being a perfect little imp of *dark*ness, my dear; about whether Nantucket was a good place for the children; about smocking on little dresses. "Don't you *love* it? Oh, Ellen, what a *pre*cious little dress—oh, my dear, I *simp*ly love it!" Pretty sitting rooms with wedding-present lamps and etchings; pretty young matrons taking a few dainty stitches in baby clothes between coffee and bridge. "Maids, my dear—Barbara Tuttle has had five different cooks in *one* month ——" Maids! And they were off, until it was time for a discreet changing of the subject as the waitress came in for the empty coffee cups.

Little Priscillas and Anthonys came in to say how do you do to mother's friends, with an eye on the chocolates: good fat babies were passed around, wrapped in shell-pink knitted blankets, rolling their

eyes, waving curled pink hands, abstractedly blowing bubbles. "An-*i-ta Potter!* I never saw anything so abso*lutely* adorable! Did you ever see anything so perfectly *dar*ling? Yes, she was a perfect *dar*ling! Look at those fat cheeks! She's the image of you, Anita."

"Oh, my dear, no! She has Paul's eyes abso*lutely*."

The dinners weren't so bad, for Joe was at them, to send her silent messages, to stroll home with along quiet evening streets, talking things over.

"Oh, *Joe!* I can't stand being bored this way much longer!"

"They want to be nice to you, darling."

"Oh, I know—but *Joe!* Don't they *ever* get tired of prohibition jokes? And all the dinners start in such an uproar from the cocktails, and then slowly die of ice water, and yet everyone keeps on screaming—that pumped-up gayety ——"

"Well, we can't sit around weeping silently."

"Why not? It wouldn't be any sadder, really."

"Last night didn't start noisily with cocktails."

"No, that was even worse. That butler with puffed alpaca sleeves, sighing down everybody's neck, and everything so rich and Christian. Do you know what we ladies did before you gentlemen joined us? We listened to the radio, and do you know what we heard? How to tell if you have heart disease, and then a talk on storage batteries."

"Evelyn, darling, you're a liar and I love you."

They kissed quickly in a shower of shadow thrown by arc light and maple tree. Everything was all right when they were together. But other dinners floated from the past to Evelyn, footmen moving quietly, guests who knew there was a world outside of Westlake. She suddenly thought of Ralph Levinson.

"Have a good time?" Kate asked her one afternoon when she came home from a bridge tea given in her honor. "Fourteen and twenty-nine and three fives are fifteen, that makes fifty-six—you have to watch Turben's bills like a hawk. There! Now tell me all about it."

Evelyn collapsed on the sofa, dropping her hat on the floor.

"I was so bored all afternoon I nearly fainted," she said.

"Dorothy wanted to be nice—they all do, because they used to play with Joe when they were children."

"Oh, I know. It's very kind of them."

She sighed, turning her head from side to side. She was trapped. She could never get away. Joe said things would be all right when they were in a house by themselves, but nothing ever changed, really. She had thought that to be married to Joe would be perfect happiness. Well, now she was married to Joe.

"They used to have such good times together—such goings-on! Did I ever show you the old photograph album? Goodness! how dusty! Wait till I get a cloth. You mustn't smudge that pretty dress. There!

There's Joe when he was a baby—cunning thing! Here he is in his little sailor suit—his hair always would stick up in the back; it does still."

Evelyn smiled, comforted by the thought of that ridiculous plume of hair.

"Hoagland took some of these with his Brownie kodak. That was Lizzie(a girl we had, and old Shep, Jodie's dog—that was a year the sweet peas were marvelous. You can see them in the background. He looks awful in this one, poor little fellow; it was just before he had measles."

"What's this picture?"

"We had a Masque of the Months in the studio, and Joe's father had a photographer to take the children. See, here's Jodie; he was the New Year, in his pink flannel pajamas, and I made him pink crêpe paper wings; he was the youngest of all. Here's Charlotte as October. I made her that sort of tunic out of orange cheesecloth, with a purple evening cape I had, and apples and grapes on the crumb tray ——"

"Who's this?"

"Jimmy Roberts. He's awfully prosperous now; he married this one, Gladys Blunt."

"Oh, I know. Bridge party last Friday."

"Yes, of course. See, he has a gilt paper crown; he was January, King of the Revels ——"

"What *is* that he's holding over his head? It *can't* be ——"

"Oh *no*, Evelyn; that's our old soup tureen without its cover—the very same one we keep string and things in on the kitchen dresser. It's supposed to be a wassail bowl."

"Who's this darling little boy in a bathing suit?"

"That's Laddie Baylow—he was August. He was shell-shocked in the war, but they thought he was all right, and then one day he just walked out of the house and they've never seen him since. Isn't it awful? They don't know whether he's alive or dead—at least, everybody thinks he *must* be dead except his poor mother; she thinks he'll just come walking in any minute. You know she turns down his bed every night, and keeps a plate of apples up in his room, and she'll hardly leave the house. Poor Mr. Baylow can hardly get her out for ten minutes, she's so afraid of not being there when Laddie comes home; she's just stretched tight all the time. It really would be better if she knew he was dead, than to go on hoping against hope this way."

"Oh no! Oh, people must keep hoping! Even if you know that hope is empty, you can't stop."

They looked at the picture again. Happiness for this child, sorrow for this one, yet nothing to tell which was coming, in the round faces. If one could have been ahead, and done something ——

"Don't you miss having the studio to work in?"

"Oh, Evelyn, I *do!* Sometimes I want to paint so

I think I'll *burst!* I'm going to get at it again, sometime, too, if ever I'm not quite so busy."

"I've never seen any of your pictures, except the saucepan and onions and that little sketch of Joe."

"Would you care to? *Really?* Now, don't think you have to be polite. I have some things hidden away in the studio, and Aunt Sarah's out driving with Charlotte. They aren't anything very marvelous, but my teachers used to say they had a lot of promise. *Carrie!* I guess she's out, too. My, Aunt Sarah keeps this place shut up! I expect she'll die if she ever finds I've had a window open. I'm afraid these'll be pretty dusty ——"

She pulled out the old canvases.

"This was a girl called Nellie Verlaine ——

"This is just a *sketch*, sunset over the water ——

"I never finished this ——

"Listen! Wasn't that the front door? Run and see if it's Aunt Sarah!"

"No, it's Joe! Come upstairs, Joseph; we're having an art exhibition."

"Oh, Joe, darling! I guess you'll think I'm crazy! I was just showing Evelyn some of my old pictures ——"

Two spots of red burned in her cheeks; stars shone in her eyes; her voice was breathless. All about her, propped against walls and chair legs, were her paintings—dead fish, flowers, two lemons and a brown jug with a high light. Nellie Verlaine in Grecian costume.

For the first time Joe really saw them. And he could hardly bear that even his Evelyn should see. He loved Kate so; he felt so fiercely protective. He was glad for her that life had kept her from her painting and so not taken away her illusion.

Chapter Twenty-one

EVELYN lay soaking in sunlight on the hill overlooking the pine woods, crushed grasses and wild strawberries staining her dress. She watched a blue-green beetle traveling through the forest of grass stalks, she rolled over on her back and saw two butterflies quivering together, saw piled golden-white clouds—what a large egg beater God must use! Life tingled about her, within her.

Joe was gathering fragrant wild strawberries that were scarlet through the grass. He moved from patch to patch; he went over the edge of the hill and was hidden. Yet he was no more separated from her than her hand was when she lifted it to shield her eyes from the sun. If the world was between them they would be together.

No need to tell each other how happy they were, off this way by themselves. But she hadn't been happy at 29 Chestnut Street.

Mrs. Green was kind. Evelyn dreaded going out, because when she came back she was sure to find that Kate had washed her silk stockings for her, or blancoed her shoes. Every day there were exhausting contests in nobility, always won by Kate. One place in Mrs. Driggs' car—Evelyn must have the ride. One perfect

peach, and the others beginning to go—Evelyn must eat it. "You've given me all the heart of the lettuce, Mrs. Green!" And Kate, eating the large limp outside leaves, would say, "I like these every bit as well." There were unstrained moments of laughter and loving-kindness between them, but most of the time they were on their guard with each other. "How wonderfully Kate Green and Joe's wife get on together," people said, watching the two women speaking to each other through their smiling masks.

Then there was poor old Carrie, oozing sentiment until Evelyn felt sticky. She and Joe couldn't look at each other without Carrie yearning toward them with understanding smiles.

And Aunt Sarah, poking and prying. But she only poked and pried into Evelyn's perfume bottles and cold-cream jar and the big box of marrons glacés Ralph Levinson had sent from New York. She didn't sniff and nibble at emotions.

Evelyn had tried to find a house that Joe could afford and she could bear to live in. Time after time J. Hartley Harrison escorted her to Colonial cottages and Mission bungalows.

"How does this strike your artistic eye, madame?"

"Oh, dreadful! Like a ticket booth for a Spanish bull fight!"

"De*lic*ious! Good afternoon, Mrs. Pratt! Nice doggy, *nice* doggy! Well, then, he was a nice doggy ——"

"*Chum!* Down, sir! He just acts that way when he sees folks are scared of him."

"Oh, I guess he just wants to pal up with me. Mrs. Green, Mrs. Pratt. I brought Mrs. Green to see your cozy little home."

"You folks'll have to excuse the way the place looks. Junior's been in the house with the pink eye."

"*I* see. Here's a very sunny, bright little living room, Mrs. Green. Of course, you with your taste could fix it up so it would look very different ——"

"Dining alcove!" said Mrs. Pratt, crossly. "Get outa the way, you Chum. China closet."

"*Ce n'est pas possible*," Evelyn murmured to Hartley.

"*Quoi? Pardonnez-moi? Oh! Je vwar*," Hartley murmured back.

Mrs. Pratt let the swing door fly at him. "Kitchen."

"*Mais je pense que vous trouvez que cette maison avez tous les convenances*, Mrs. Green. *Le—Le—* electricity, modern plumbing—broom closet ——"

He opened the door, and a dust pan slid on to his head.

"Sun porch. Look out, Mr. Harrison!"

Something small and wheeled shot from under Hartley's foot as he clutched a plant stand.

"Junior Pratt, what did mamma tell you about leaving your things laying round?"

"No harm done, Mrs. Pratt; no bones broken! Well, sir, how do you do?"

"Junior!"

"Huh?"

"Didn't you hear the gentleman?"

"Ah-huh."

"Well, then, answer him."

"Enswer him *w-h-a-t?*"

"I said how do you *do*, sir?"

"I got the pink eye."

"So I see. Well, well, that's too bad! Now I wonder if I have anything here that's good for pink eye. Well! Now I wonder what *this* can be?"

"Lemme *see!*"

"Junior!"

"It's *chaw*clut!"

"Junior!"

"*W-h-a-t?*"

"What what? What *mamma.* Say thank you to the gentleman."

"That's a great little fellow you have there!"

"I'll show you upstairs now."

"Really, Mr. Harrison—there's no use wasting any more time ——"

"No trouble at all, Mrs. Green. A great little fellow! I always enjoy being with the kiddies. My mother—she has a delicious sense of humor—bathroom—always says with a twinkle in her eye that it's because I'm nothing but a kid myself. You know we're never grown up to our mothers. And mother and I have always been great pals ——"

"Spare room."

"*I* see! Guest room, Mrs. Green. One of my favorite songs is Kipling's 'Mother o' Mine,' really simply because of the way it's written, and the subject. Doubtless you're familiar with it ——"

"Linen clawset."

"Hm! Hm!

> " 'If I were hanged on the highest hill,
> Mother o' mine, oh, mother o' mine ——' "

"Hired girl's room."

> " 'I know whose love would follow me still,
> Mother o' mine, oh, mother o' mine.'

Lovely thing, isn't it?"

"I really am afraid ——"

"*Je comprends absolument que vous ne pensez pas que la maison est très jolie maintenant, mais vous pouvez il faire très charmant, je suis sure, avec votre*—er—uh—own furniture. *Elle est une très bien dame, je suis sure, mais vous voyez pas avec un*—uh—background *de culture, et il est—qu'est-ce que c'est le mot?* Sugar! Isn't that funny how rusty one gets? I don't get much opportunity to keep up my French—but, anyway, I mean *you* could make it very very attractive."

"I'm sorry ——"

"Well, thank you, Mrs. Pratt, thank you very much, So long, young fellow. That's a *won*derful little kiddie, Mrs. ——"

And *bang!* The door would shut.

Evelyn would come back from house hunting exhausted and despairing. And she had felt so ill almost all the time since she knew she was going to have a child. Joe had never known whether he would come home in the evening to a brave, noble Evelyn, hiding the ache in her heart in a manner not to be ignored, or to a despairing Evelyn ready to burst into tears, pouring out her troubles in his arms. But now she felt well again, and happy because just she and Joe were together.

Faint on the warm wind she heard the church bells. She could almost see the little procession leaving 29 Chestnut Street—Hoagland in his golf clothes and diamond-patterned stockings, leading Aunt Sarah out to where Charlotte and Charlie the chauffeur waited in the closed car; Aunt Sarah bundled up in her cloth mantle, cold in spite of the warm sun, her head nodding, her lips moving, her old hands trembling in their nice kid gloves. Hoagland helping her patiently. "Take your time, Aunt Sarah. My goodness! you're spryer than any of us—you'd better come on out to the Club and have a game of golf with me." After them Carrie, fastening a sleeve, turning an ankle, dropping a prayer book and hymnal that showered the path with little cards and snips of palm and pressed lilies of the valley, pleased because she was going to church in an automobile. And last of all, Kate, in the hat trimmed with blue morning-glories that Joe had chosen

for her last summer and that she still considered rather too conspicuous, slamming the door shut and hiding the key under the mat.

Joe, coming back through the grasses, looked toward his wife with a pure flooding out of love. "Evelyn," he said to himself, silently, answering everything.

The ground was beginning to develop hard bumps; insects strolled ticklingly across her face. She sat up, yawning, stretching her arms to reach the sun, the sky.

"Evelyn! Come here! Here's a wonderful patch!"

"Bring some here!"

"Lazybones!"

"Joe!"

"What?"

"*You* come *here!* I want to say something tender, and I can't yell it across a field and a half. And bring the strawberries. Gosh! what a bandanna! Really, Mr. Green dearie, do you expect me to eat them out of *that?*"

"Hey! Leave me some!"

"Joe—I'm too happy—it frightens me."

"Are you, darling?"

"Hear the church bells."

"You ought to be there telling God you're a miserable sinner."

"You ought to be there in a cutaway coat putting old ladies into pews and marching up the aisle with the collection plate."

"What else do you hear?"

"Cowbells—running water ——"

"That's the stream in the woods. And bees humming."

"Something else."

"What?"

"I don't know—things growing. I wish we could live out here."

"Evelyn!"

"What?"

"We could! See the gray house down there? We could get that for nothing, almost, because it's supposed to be haunted. There was a crazy old woman lived alone there for years, and she died alone, too; they found her lying face down in a shower of wormy little apples at the bottom of the cellar steps. She must have been there for days ——"

"Joe *darling!* You're making it sound so inviting and homelike!"

"Think of having a pine woods for a back yard."

"Think of being out of Westlake—think of being away from bridge lamps and fruit cocktails!"

"Evelyn, would you try it?"

"It might be quite fun."

"Would you be lonely?"

"Wouldn't you live there, too?"

He suddenly bent and kissed her foot. Her eyes filled with tears. "Oh, Joe, my darling, don't!"

"Their little nest," thought Carrie, joggling gently on the back seat of Charlotte's closed car. Curtain rings, samples of chintz, double boiler, picture wire, garbage pail—she hadn't forgotten anything. How comfortable the cushions were; how easily the car took the steep hill. She flapped a gracious hand at a stolid child. Perhaps not *quite* respectful of Charlie to wear his cap so far on the back of his head? Would he, if Charlotte or Hoagland were in the car? But the small cloud passed. The day was so lovely; she felt so helpful and important. Oh! Oh! The blue flags along the stream were out! That winding strip of blue through the wet green—heaven couldn't be more beautiful. "Our Father which art in heaven—" she began, squeezing her eyes tight in ecstasy, then opening them. Mustn't be sacrilegious, praying out-of-doors in an automobile, not even kneeling down.

That cap! But probably Charlie just didn't know any better. She thanked him very pleasantly as she got out of the car and went into the haunted house, bowing with gracious dignity to the workmen sunning themselves after lunch. So many legs, stretched out all over the place—but workmen seemed so refined nowadays, with their automobiles and their thermos bottles. That young one with curly hair might easily be a college graduate doing it for the psychological experience—or did she mean physiological?

Charlie gave them a wink as he followed her with

the garbage pail. "How happy they sound!" Carrie thought, smiling, as she heard their laughter.

"Hoo-hoo!" she sang on a falling note.

"Upstairs!"

> "'I'm coming! I'm coming!
> Though my head am bending low.
> I hear those angel voices calling ——'

oop! Of course I had to step on my skirt. Hey-oh, girls! Did you think I'd eloped? I thought they'd *never* wait on me at Trenchard's; the store was *simp*ly jammed; and then just as that red-headed clerk was going to wait on me, this loud-looking woman simply pushed right in front of me, really *pushed*, and said she wanted to look at lawn mowers! I simply looked at her—I think she felt it, too. I had a lovely ride out, Charlotte, thank you muchly. Did you girls notice the mountain laurel? I never saw so much bloom, and so pink—the daintiest thing!"

"It looks like fat pink sheep all through the pines."

"I know, Kate; that's exactly what I mean. My! But we're gettin' to look booful!"

But I wouldn't live here for a million dollars, she thought. Of course, I don't believe in ghosts, but, *good*ness! And then way off from everybody. And queer things *do* happen. It might be all right by day, but by night—no, *thank* you! Yet with some one you loved perhaps you wouldn't be afraid even at night.

Kate was perched on a stepladder; Charlotte was

pushing rods through curtains. They had done wonders, Kate especially, since their first horrified outcries when Joe and Evelyn bought the haunted house. Then the old woman's life work of cut paper still rustled at windows, at doors, from mantelpieces, fly-spotted and torn. The house was curtained with stars, flowers, patterns of snowflakes, filth. It spoke in sighs, and with a small complaining voice as the wind ran up and down its uncarpeted stairs or cried through the broken windows. When rain fell and the staring eyes streamed with tears, milk pails had to be set here and there, under leaks, and the plop-plop of the drops sounded like plucked strings. The attic, the crazy brain of the house, swarmed with mice and weaving spiders. But now Joe and Evelyn had been living there for a week, and after to-day there would be nothing more for Kate to do.

She had her white walls and orange curtains at last, though they were in Joe's house. She had suggested them, because Evelyn seemed so vague about what she did want, so indifferent to all the practical details. Perhaps I'm doing *too* much, Kate thought. Perhaps I'm being a regular Mrs. Buttinsky. But *some*body's got to do things, and Evelyn won't. And, anyway, I want to save her as much as I can just now. I'll leave them alone after to-morrow, though goodness knows how they'll manage.

"Tack hammer! Tack hammer!" she called to Carrie.

"Here you are. Oh, bother! Of course I had to upset the whole saucer of tacks! My goodness! Katiekins, I think you're wonderful to be able to sit way up there without being dizzy. I'd *love* to do it, to help, but I absolutely couldn't. It's the funniest thing about me—when I get on a high place I have this insane desire to jump off. They say very highly strung people *do* feel that way."

Who's Carrie showing off to now? Oh, the curly-haired young electrician. Poor old Carrie, so excited, with her head tied up in a gypsy handkerchief, and her eyes shining behind her glasses.

"Sometimes I have these *viv*id dreams that I'm falling. Well, I simply wake up trembling all *over* ——"

"Hammy 'at cur'u', pleash," said Kate through tacks.

"*What*, Kate?"

"'*At!*" Kate prodded the air with her forefinger.

"I don't—I—*oh!* The *cur*tain! I remember when I was in St. Paul's in London, dear old St. Paul's, it was almost irresistible just to fling myself down ——"

"Did you get the samples of chintz for the sofa, Carrie?" Charlotte asked.

"Indeed I *did*, Lottchen! That reminds me, I must measure again. Mr. Totten calculated how much'd be needed for a sofa they have there, but I told him my seat was wider. Wouldn't you say it was more than five feet six inches? And then he wanted to know

whether we wanted a frill to hide our legs or not, and I wasn't posilutely absotively certain. Here the samples are. I know they're awful; I don't know why I bothered to bring them out. Here's one. No, that color's dreadful ——"

"Why, no, I think it's pretty."

"Well, yes, it *is* pretty; now that I really look at it, I think it's fascinating ——"

"I didn't mean that one; I meant the one with the Chinese pagodas."

"Oh yes! That *is* handsome! I think the sofa would be wonderful done in that, really! That other one is much too wishy-washy, no character. I hate wishy-washy things. I knew it wouldn't do; I just let them put it in at Small's; but the pagoda one I was positive you'd like. Shall I call up and tell them that one'll do?"

"I think it's all right. Don't you, Aunt Kate?"

"What does Evelyn think?"

"Oh, of course! What *does* Evelyn think?"

"Where is she?"

"She *was* in here. *Eve*lyn! Well, I guess she'll be back."

"There, Aunt Kate, I don't believe there's anything more I can do, and I have to call for the children; they're at Bunny Roberts's birthday party. You and Carrie are about ready, aren't you?"

"You two go on. I think I'll just go down and

finish putting in the books for them, and then everything really will be done. Joe won't mind running me in when he gets home. It won't take him a minute."

The workmen were going, too. The house grew silent. Kate sat idle among the books, realizing how tired she was, remembering the fun, the excitement of those first days at 29 Chestnut Street. Where to put the big chair? Where to hang the saucepan and onions? Waiting, when twilight came, for the click of the gate ——

She roused herself, and began pushing in Joe's old bound volumes of *Saint Nicholas* that had left such a big gap in the bookcase at home. Pictures of little girls with deep silky bangs and little boys with broad collars—"Denise and Ned Toodles"—she had worried because Jodie liked that better than the more virile "Boys of the Rinkum Ranch"——

> "She came to me on Christmas Day,
> In tissue, with a card to say
> From Santa Claus and Uncle John,
> And not a stitch the child had on!"

"Dear St. Nicholas,

I am one of your little readers in far-away Australia—"

Jodie had written a letter to *St. Nicholas* once. "Dear St. Nicholas,

I am eight years old. I have a dog named Shep—"

They had all been so excited when it was printed. They had had cream puffs from the Vienna Bakery for supper, to celebrate.

Where is my little lost boy?

Well, it was peaceful at home, now, anyway. Evelyn didn't make a restful atmosphere. She was either quivering with life or silent and depressed. But she had made meal times exciting—almost terrifying. Kate never knew when she was going to talk about her baby, right in front of Joe, or swear. What did Aunt Sarah think? But, after all, did Aunt Sarah think of anything any more, except food and warmth? Then Evelyn might drop into French at any moment. Kate hadn't meant to tell a story, but, somehow, just at first, she had let Evelyn get the impression that French or English, it was all one to her, and she had had miserable moments since. It sometimes seemed to her that Evelyn must have guessed ——

Now they sat through meals, Aunt Sarah never speaking, lifting her cup with both trembling old hands, sucking in her tea, a tepid trickle of talk flowing from Carrie.

Kate had her own room again. But it was haunted. Something quivered in the air.

She heard the roar outside that meant Joe and the Ford had come home, and put on her hat. The last book was in place; the fresh sweet room waited for Joe's and Evelyn's appreciation. She went out of the

door, saw Evelyn coming from the woods and Joe going to meet her, saw the long still embrace.

She almost ran until she was around the curve. Then she hurried along the empty road through twilight that blotted up the colors of earth and sky.

Chapter Twenty-two

EVELYN had thought she and Joe would always speak and answer really, be crystal clear to each other. But now they were married there were stretches of muddle, of fog; sometimes she was filled with a panic of nervousness. There were times when she didn't know what to say to him, how to interest and please him. Easy enough to say, "Just be yourself," but what *is* yourself? And she missed the old life.

Sitting high in the muddy Ford, in the prim upright position that Fords demand, she remembered lying back in Ralph's Hispano-Suiza, tearing around corners, making peasants jump and run. Mimosa trees in golden showers, a painted cart crammed with grass, the horse nodding with feathers and chiming with bells, a saint in a faded blue-plaster heaven, and Ralph beside her, making her feel beautiful and exquisite, as he always could.

Now instead of that, the maple trees turning red, Plunkett's delivery automobile, the Christian Science Church, Joe saying: "Darling, do wipe off your mouth. I hate that color."

She had felt that her soul's desire was for a country life, away from the turmoil of town. And when Joe was with her the sun-hot pine needles were silky soft,

squirrels in the trees tossed and twirled the cones in their little hands, and rippled and quivered their tails; she heard the cry under the waterfall and through the sound of the pines. But when she was alone the woods were silent with a silence that threatened.

"All I ask from life is a book and a brook and a pine tree," she had said once to Ralph Levinson in his mother's box at the opera. And now she had all three. But the ground under the pine needles turned hard so quickly. She twisted around, trying to get comfortable, propping herself against a scratchy tree trunk; she lit a cigarette and began to read Christina Rossetti. Beautiful thoughts would be good for the baby.

> "Good-by in fear, good-by in sorrow,
> Good-by, and all in vain,
> Never to meet again, my dear—
> Never to part again.
> Good-by to-day, good-by to-morrow ——"

Good *heavens!* This was awful! And yet this was the same place where she and Joe had been so blissful last Sunday, when the ground had felt like a feather bed. They had laughed and been silly all the shining day, in a warm intimacy.

She heard a crackling behind her. Tramps? Silent now, except for the waterfall, smooth as glass, then plunging. Ferns quivered in the spray. She would look at falling water and quivering dripping fern, and think about her baby.

But what was there to think? I'm going to have a baby; I'm glad I'm going to. I hope it's a boy. I hope it's going to act like Joe and look like me. What else? That couldn't have taken half a minute. Women in books had beautiful thoughts beginning, "Oh, my little baby—" But how to go on?

She yawned until tears stood in her eyes. Oh, what were her old friends doing now? Where were they making a noise? She longed for a noise, loud voices, screams of laughter, ice in a cocktail shaker ——

Had she ordered anything for dinner, or had she just made a list and left it beside the telephone? Had she the nerve to give poor Joe baked beans again? There were the blackberries she had bought from old Tom Davis because he was so old and had a long white beard and had come to the door like a gnome from a fairy tale—partly, too, because of the color of the small scarlet leaves stuck here and there to the wet blackberries as he poured them from his basket into her trembling scales. A silly reason for buying blackberries, when Joe said he would just as soon eat solidified ink.

Come on, Christina, I'll give you one more chance!

> "These days are long before I die:
> To sit alone upon a thorn ——"

Well that's what it feels like! It must be nearly time for Joe to come home. I've been here enjoying nature for hours! She had forgotten to wind her

wrist watch. But when she reached home it was ten minutes past three.

It was heavenly to flop down on the Chinese-pagoda sofa with an armful of literature—the new *Cosmopolitan*, the new *Vogue*—there was a picture of Ralph at the races, with that Ludlow girl with the fat legs, and René de Villiers—a new movie magazine, some French novels Ralph had sent. Joe found her there when he came home. She pulled him down to her, nearly strangling him.

"Joe, darling, I've missed you so—the day lasted forever! Only I thought it was about four, and it's half past six! Golly! I haven't started to get supper ——"

"Didn't the new girl show up?"

"Not a sign of her."

"Hard luck! Did the laundry come back?"

"I guess so—I haven't been out in the kitchen. Why?"

"I wanted to change my shirt, and I haven't any with buttons. Do you suppose you could put one or two on for me? If I could just have the top ones. I don't ask for them all the way down, just the top?"

"Why don't you leave them out? I always tell you to leave them out."

"I do; they're out all over the place."

"Well, of course I'll sew them on, only they don't seem to stay. Joe ——"

"Hello!"

"I'm terribly afraid I forgot to order— Would you mind awfully if we had nice lovely delicious baked beans?"

"Fine!" said Joe, who had had them for the past three nights.

After the beans and blackberries and two cups of tepid mud and water, Joe settled at his desk with a handful of papers.

"Joey, don't work to-night."

"I must. This means a little extra, and fixing up the house cost so much more than I expected."

"*Don't* work to-night! I've been so lonely all day."

"Now be a good child and keep quiet."

"You're the most selfish man I ever knew. You never think of me!"

"Don't be silly."

His papers rustled; she yawned on the sofa, sighing now and then.

"Evelyn, don't you ever like to read?"

"I'm *sick* of reading! I'm sick of everything!"

He made no answer. She moved about the room, picking up books, putting them down, twitching a curtain. She looked at his head bent over his writing, and wanted to scream.

"It's all right for you, seeing people and everything, but here I am all by myself all day ——"

"We can live in Westlake if you'd rather."

"*Pff! West*lake!"

"Westlake's all right. You've just made up your mind not to like the people."

She hated him as he began to write again; they were hard against each other, and far apart. I have ruined my life, she thought. And Joe thought, oh, Evelyn, keep still and stop being so sorry for yourself. They were strangers, lost to each other, as they said good night.

But hearing her crying in the dark, he came to comfort her.

"Oh, Joe, Joe, is it all right again?"

"Of course it is—everything's all right. Don't cry, my own."

"Do you love me again?"

"I always loved you."

"We must never lose each other that way again, never, never! Hold me! Hold me closer, Joe. We might lose the way back to each other!"

Waves of the night lifted them off the jagged day, floated them out into the dark, the deep.

"Well, Hatty, have you heard our thrilling news? . . . No, I haven't been waited on. I want some broad pale-pink satin ribbon, please . . . no, really *pale* pink. If she calls that pale, I wonder what she calls bright! Joe has a little girl!"

"No! A little *girl!* How marvelous!" Nothing else could have surprised me, Miss Butterfield's tone

implied, but a little *girl*—who ever heard of such a thing?

"I'm getting this to bind some crib blankets. I was telling Miss Butterfield my son's just had a little girl. Yes, indeed it *is!* Don't you think this is pretty, Hatty? So delicate. Let's see—I calculated eight times from my nose to my hand—how many yards would that be?"

"What are they going to call her?" asked Miss Butterfield, getting out her notebook.

"Hope. I simply wouldn't *hear* of them naming her after me——"

"Hope. That's very sweet. I'll be wanting a picture of her little ladyship for my page, Kate."

"We're going to have her taken with Aunt Sarah. You know it's her ninety-sixth birthday next week."

Hope lay in Aunt Sarah's arms, blowing bubbles. Mr. Minty's son, who took the photographs, said he had never seen such a good baby.

The reproduction in the *Sunday News* was rather black, but it was large and impressive and the only picture on the society page except a tiny one of Mrs. Elmer Kress, chairman of the musical department of the Woman's Club, which didn't really count. Under Aunt Sarah and the baby was printed:

A new and charming photograph of Mrs. Elisha Whipple and her winsome wee great-grandniece Hope, lovely little daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Montgomery Green, Jr. Mrs. Green will be remembered as Miss Evelyn Thorne of

New York and Paris. Mrs. Whipple, one of Westlake's most gracious grande dames, received the congratulations of her hosts of friends on the celebration of her 96th birthday last Wednesday, while little Miss Hope is still a very young lady, having been born November 7th. Home Portrait by Alfred Ernest Minty.

Aunt Sarah ordered six copies of the *News* to send to friends. But after Carrie had cut out the pictures for her they lay on the table in her room. Who were the friends, and where were they? She couldn't remember.

Joe could hardly believe this little fragrant rose was his, holding out her hands to him, clinging to his finger, going to sleep in his arms. The way her silk hair was rubbed up into a fuzz in the back—her wholehearted pink yawn ——

Evelyn was better than ever after the birth of her child. She needed strength for that bitter winter, when the food froze in the kitchen, and the iron latches of the doors were so cold they burned the hand. Pipes froze; buckets of frozen water had to be melted on the stove. "If anyone had ever told me I'd be excited over having enough hot water to take a bath in ——!" she cried. At night they would not dare to move from the spots in the icy sheets their bodies had heated; their drawn-up legs were cramped; their hips ached. Joe got up stiffly in the morning, his breath puffing out in clouds, and lit the oil stove before Evelyn, shivering, scrambled into her clothes and ran down to

the kitchen, carrying Hope wrapped in blankets. They spent most of their time in the kitchen. It was the warmest room in the house, and generally empty of maids, although now and then a Delia or an Oscarina came for a few days. But the house was lonely and inconvenient, and people still called it haunted. "Sure, I'm sorry to say, Mrs. Green—" or, "Ay bane leavin'—" or, sometimes, without farewell, they never came back from their Thursday out.

Evelyn struggled with the cookbook; tears and cigarette ashes fell into the frying pan; hot grease spat out and burnt her wrists. Snow piled against the windows, filled the empty road, fell silently in the gathering dusk. "Everybody's here," her mother wrote from Palm Beach, where she was staying with Mrs. Prather. "Ralph L. gave a big fancy-dress dance for the youngest du Moulin girl; he was a Rajah in purple with a tight cloth-of-silver turban. I wore that old black tulle Pierrette thing, and Lotta Prather was a white peacock with a long train of feathers that turned up when she pulled a string—you never saw such a sight in your life. R. had a dancing floor built out under the palms, with colored lanterns, and everyone went in swimming at sunrise ——"

"Oh, Joe, I must dance or I'll burst!" Evelyn cried. So they went into town with Hope and a suit case, and in Charlotte's good-taste guest room with its empty Venetian-glass perfume bottles and empty painted tin match box, and *Pathways to Peace* and *A Wanderer*

in Florence on the bedside table, Evelyn got into the black gown she had worn in Venice and the pearls that still worried Westlake—could they be real? And then they all went to the Subscription Dance at the Golf Club, and Hoagland danced with Evelyn while Joe danced with Charlotte, and then Jimmy Roberts danced with Evelyn, while Joe danced with Gladys.

The winter mornings were so still that the silence hummed. The birch trees were white against white. Joe carried out Hope, wrapped in white wool and fur. Their bright blue shadows followed them across the meadow; the snow squeaked under his feet. The little girl's cheeks were as red as the berries cased in ice along the frozen stream.

Evelyn loved her baby. She bathed her by the kitchen stove, she washed bottles, she even tried—once—to make a little dress. "I must say she is a changed girl," Kate said. But life raged through Evelyn's body; she felt, as she sat by Hope's crib trying to keep her mind on *The Care and Feeding of Infants*, as a rocket must feel as it splits the sky the second before it bursts. And then Joe would come home, and be content to sit all evening reading, too tired to keep awake after ten o'clock.

Chapter Twenty-three

AFTER Carrie had put the broom handle through the china-closet door and fallen downstairs with a nest of cut-glass bowls, Kate said it was too lovely a day for her to spend indoors, and she must go out and take a nice walk as far as the Kellys', and ask if Mrs. Kelly could wash the curtains next week. The Kellys' pig was grunting with joy as it rubbed itself against a blossoming peach tree; there was a spatter of blue egg shell by the tumble-down back steps. Carrie's heart swelled with the spring. I must hurry home and help poor Kate, she thought, but she went on, along the path by the edge of the woods that led to Poor Farm Road. There were flowers for her to gather, and the sky was so deep a blue it made her want to cry. Once she had to pass a strange man, and her heart fluttered, but she pretended she had a dog just out of sight in the woods, and called, "Here, sir! Here, Lad! Good dog, then!" and the man went past without even looking at her.

Evelyn was down by the stream, stripping branches from the wild cherry trees that flung themselves in an ecstasy of whiteness against the dark pines. She tore them off; they showered her with last night's rain. Her wet face was bright with excitement.

"Hey-oh, lady love!"

"Hello, Carrie! What were you doing in the woods?"

"That'd be telling," said Carrie, blushing and beaming because Evelyn was laughing at her, friendly and warm—because the cherry trees were so white and the sky so blue. "What's the lady doin' herself?"

"Getting ready to make an impression on an old beau."

"Now 'fess up!"

"Try to stop me! Ralph Levinson ——"

"Oh, my! The one whose sisters are Lady Clandugald and Lady Waller? *That* one?" cried Carrie, who never missed Society Across the Sea in the Sunday paper. "Do you know *him?*"

"*Do* I? I'll tell you a secret, Carrie—I nearly married him once. But I haven't seen him for a thousand years—not since I married Joe instead. He telephoned from Green Falls that he was motoring through, and he's coming to dinner. I haven't a thing to eat, but Joe has a bottle of really grand Bacardi. Cherry blossoms and cocktails and tender memories ought to see us through, don't you think?"

Carrie twisted off a few blossoming twigs the length of a pencil. "Here, lady dear, and look, you can have my wildflowers, too; there're some blue violets and spring beauties and dogtooth violets—I got them in the woods. Oh, Evelyn, isn't it lovely to-day? I never saw anything such a bright green as the skunk

cabbages, only it seems awful to call anything so beautiful such a dreadful name. What was that name Mr. Partridge had for skunks? Or I guess it was polecats. Something funny, and yet it was refined—oh, I know, Pussy Polaris! Listen to the brook. Mercy, how tough these branches are! Isn't it singing a sweet little song? I think it's so restful after all the noise and talk and the rush of life nowadays, just to be quiet and listen to a sweet little song like this. We're none of us quiet enough, are we? There always seems to be *some*thing that just *has* to be done, and it's restful just to get away from everything and let nature talk to us. What do you think that little brook's saying to us? I think it's trying to tell us all sorts of secrets, don't you? It seems most as if you could hear the words, don't it? I'll help you carry these over to the house, and then I must fly. We're right in the middle of house cleaning. I don't like to leave Kate too long, unless I can help you some way? I'd love to, Evelyn!"

Poor old thing, with her muddy shoes and wilting wildflowers, excited because another woman is going to meet a man who loved her once. Evelyn kissed her swiftly, lightly, and she trailed away, tears in her happy eyes.

Hope was playing in the grass by the barn when Joe came home. He was so tall that even when she stood up she had to turn her face right back to look

at him. He swung her up, and she threw her arms around his neck and gave him a loud smacking kiss.

"Hello, Dirty-face! Who's been giving you chocolate?"

"Cussing Carrie."

She stiffened in his arms, flung herself backward, and then plunged toward him, with wet sticky kisses. He put her down, and pretended to scrub his face, while she doubled up with laughter, fat little hands on knees, shining silver hair swinging over red cheeks. She enjoyed life so, the miracles of flowers, animals, popping corn, the tracks of meadow mice on the snow, writing fairy tales for a little girl. She and Joe had examined these things together.

She pressed a gift on him now—a hot handful of stemless dandelions. How he adored his child! Playing alone, trying to pick up a much too big ball with a much too small hand, sitting down unexpectedly; her pink face when she had been naughty; asleep, wrapped away from him in innocent mystery.

Evelyn, an apron over her mauve gown, was gazing at herself in the hall mirror. She turned as they came in, her eyes shining. There was a note in her voice that he had not heard for a long time.

"Joe, Ralph Levinson's coming to dinner. Will you make some cocktails? I got out the Bacardi and lemons and things. Hope, you piggy-wiggy! Come and let mother wash you. What have you been doing to get so dirty, darling?"

"Evelyn, Hartley Harrison's coming out to dinner, too."

"Oh, *damn!*"

"He came in to see me, and talked so much about how lonely he was. His little motherkin and his teeny-weeny infinitesimal grandmotherkin are off on a visit, so I ——"

"Oh, well, never mind! I don't care. Effa's here getting dinner. Your mother sent her. Did you ever hear of anything so angelic? And they're right in the middle of house cleaning, too. Effa and the asparagus came taxicabbing out together. Carrie was here, and she told Mrs. Green Ralph was coming and we didn't have anyone. *Strong* cocktails, Joey! Kiss me! Come on, Hope!"

Hartley's ladylike coupé followed Ralph's long olive-green car, and Hartley stood waiting, pretending to admire the first star above the pines, as Evelyn welcomed Ralph. She was startled by the pang that shot through her as he kissed her hand.

"You look like a branch of dewy lilac," he said.

"And see, I'm wearing your shawl! A subtle compliment."

"*H'm!* I hope I'm not intruding," said Hartley. Patience was all very well, but it had its limits.

"Mercy, no, Mr. Harrison! I need you to keep Joe occupied while Mr. Levinson and I whisper in a corner. Ralph, I'm not at all shy with you, but I am with your overwhelming chauffeur. What do we do with

him? I've forgotten how to behave with chauffeurs you call Martindale; I've gotten used to the kind you call Charlie—really I'm used to the kind you call Joe and Evelyn. Oh, he's gliding scornfully away—what a relief! *Look* at the place we live in, Ralph! Crazy? Mr. Harrison tried hard to get me to live somewhere else, didn't you? I don't mean he's invited me to elope—you've been very slow about that, Mr. Harrison. Here's my beautiful baby. Say, 'How do you do, Mr. Levinson?', darling."

"How do, Mittah Lev'son darling?" inquired Hope, fizzing with laughter.

"Mrs. Green—h'm—h'm—Mrs. Green. Joe didn't tell me it was going to be a dinner party, or I would have worn my Tuck."

"It isn't a dinner party, and you're dazzling compared to Joe. Listen!"

They could hear ice in a cocktail shaker. "That's Joe, making that noise—and he does it all with his hind legs! *Joe!* Oh, Ralph, I really am excited, though I'm hiding it so well!"

"Thank you, I don't indulge," said Hartley, as Joe passed around a tinkling tray of frosty amber glasses. "No, I don't smoke, sir, but don't let me stop *you*."

The orange curtains were drawn; firelight and shaded lamplight threw quivering fragile shadows of cherry branches on wall and ceiling. "New dwess!" cried Hope to Ralph, lifting the brief lemon-yellow frock Kate had made, so high that Evelyn caught her

up, laughing. "Darling! A lady doesn't show a gentleman her panties, even when she has a new dress!"

"H'm! H'm!" coughed Hartley, trying to cover the unfortunate word.

"Now say good night. No, baby, can't have a cocktail! Ralph, isn't she an angel?"

She went in Effa's arms, kissing an outspread hand to them. Joe watched her go out of the bright room, up the shadowy stairs. He had been an inarticulate poet, an artist dissatisfied with his creative power, aching all his life with things he could not express, until everything was expressed in this little gold and silver daughter.

I must be broad-minded, Hartley told himself, digging into his melon. There have been some very cultured Jews. Mendelssohn—yes, indeed, Mendelssohn. I'll just mention him sometime during the course of the evening. I think that ought to please Mr. Levinson. What other famous Jews were there? "Christ" popped into his head, but he dismissed the thought as sacrilegious. But I hope I can remember not to tell any Hebrew jokes!

"I'm starved, Evelyn," Ralph was saying. "We reached Westlake earlier than I expected, and I tried to get some tea. They sent me to a ghastly place with females dressed as Dutch windmills ——"

"Goff's."

"My windmill tried her best to get me to take ice cream—at five in the afternoon!"

"Oh, now, Ralph, you've eaten bombettas with me at worse hours than that!"

"Bombettas? I don't quite—" Hartley put in.

"Oh, ice cream and squish and stuff, in St. Mark's Square in Venice."

"Ah, yes, Palazzo San Marco!"

"It makes me homesick to think of it, Ralph. Not homesick, just the opposite. Is the dwarf who sells tuberoses still there? I must be honest. You never did eat the bombettas; I always ate mine and yours, too. Go on about this afternoon. Did you get any tea?"

"I got warm water and a cheesecloth bag to dip into it, and some cakes like sea anemones stuffed with sawdust."

"Tck, tck!" Hartley looked sympathetic. "Too bad you didn't know about Come On Inn. They serve a very dainty afternoon tea with waffles, and it's run by two very lovely girls, the Misses Fosby. In fact one of them, Miss Hazel, is going to be Josephine in the benefit 'Pinafore' we're rehearsing for the hospital. A very sweet voice. I happen to have seen quite a little of her lately, as I have the honor of being—h'mm —Rafe Rackstraw. *H'm!*

"Farewell, my own, light of my life, farewell ——"

He beat time with a fork from which a stalk of asparagus dangled.

Light of my life. Joe smiled at Evelyn; she smiled at him.

"Are you interested in music, Mr. Levinson? Personally, I'm devoted to it, as I think our good host and hostess will testify. Not jazz—that I think goes without saying—but real music. Take Mendelssohn, for instance—there was a real Jew!"

The word echoed in his horrified ears. Of course he had meant to say "there was a real musician!" Ralph began to talk to Evelyn about Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue, every glance, every gesture, saying, "How exquisite you are!" "Seen any good motion pictures lately?" Hartley asked Joe, feebly. But soon he had recovered enough to explain to the table that he was going to buy a vacuum cleaner for the little mother's birthday present.

"In fact, that's what I owe this very delicious dinner and delightful company to. . . . No, thank you, no potato. I find it's better for me to cut out the starches. Personally, I always think it's better to go to the fountain head, so when I thought of a vacuum cleaner I thought of Joe Green, and went to see him about it. Isn't that the case, Joe? I plan to tie a bunch of carnations to the handle—we know the ladies appreciate having things prettied up, don't we, sir? Our host and I are both in businesses that have real romance in them, to my way of thinking, the romance of home building. I supply the home, Mr. Green here lightens the task of the home maker. What is your line, sir?"

"I'm a dilettante."

"*I* see. Ah! Strawberry shortcake! Now how did you know that was my favorite dessert, Madame Hostess? By the way, I was very much interested in the glimpse I caught of your crest, on your automobile, Mr. Levinson. I got very much interested in the whole subject when I was hunting up the Harrison crest sometime ago—a boar's head ——"

Evelyn choked into her glass of water. Joe had to glare at her severely. How he adored her, warm, laughing, absurd, as she hadn't been for so long. How close they were, in their imperative need of each other.

"I hope you'll forgive me for running away so early," said Hartley, after he had refused coffee for fear it would keep him awake. "But before I knew I was to have the pleasure of this very delightful occasion I arranged with Miss Hazel Fosby to run over our duets for 'Pinafore,' and I don't like to disappoint her. Very happy to have met you, sir!" And he archly and daringly sang:

"Farewell, my own!"

very high, as he shook hands with Evelyn.

"Boil your sugar and water until it spins to a thread, and then you have J. Hartley Harrison's voice," Evelyn said. "You see, I've learned to read cookbooks, Ralph."

Joe took Effa back to Westlake, and stayed to answer Kate's eager questions. There was no hurry.

Evelyn would want to hear about her old friends. Ralph had gone when he reached home, and for a moment he thought Evelyn had been crying. But, arms so tight about his neck that she nearly strangled him, she told him over and over again how perfectly happy she was and how she loved him.

Chapter Twenty-four

"FEELS almost like summer, don't it?" Mrs. Driggs asked acquaintances as she came out of church. Walking home, because Noble liked to have his Sundays as free as possible, she let her sealskin coat fly open, and Mr. Driggs' face turned as red as a beet, as she told him several times. Noble had a big fire in the furnace. "Isn't it always the way?" she said. "If it was a chilly day he'd have let it go out, but here it's almost like summer—just a sliver of the well done, and some gravy on my potato, Papa—he's got a fire hot enough to roast us." And she added what she had been saying for over thirty years: "That man's so stupid I honestly don't think I can put up with him much longer."

It was a relief, after the big Sunday dinner that took endurance even on a cold day, to take off her heavily boned silk dress with the high net collar, to let her corsets pop open, and, in petticoat and dressing sacque, collapse with knees wide apart into the rocking chair by the window for a little rest before she tackled the Sunday papers.

"Why don't you have a good lie-down, Papa? It'd do you good. You ought to have seen your face, coming home from church! Just imagine this warm a

day in November. I guess it must be Indian summer, maybe. Charlotte's going to take Mrs. Whipple for a drive this afternoon, it's so nice. 'S'kind of funny to remember how grand the old lady used to be, with her coachman and acting so superior and everything, and now she's very glad to go for a ride in Hoagland's Packard. Well, it's a queer world."

A steady gentle grunting from the bed indicated that her husband was asleep already, and she thought of lying down herself, on the sofa heaped with cushions in what Annie Laurie Collins, who had taken up interior decorating, called "boudoir tints" of old rose and mauve, scratchy with gold lace. The cushions, of course, had to be put in a chair before you could lie down on the sofa. There was a great deal of gold lace and galloon in the room, on lamp shades, on the hoop-skirt doll Mrs. Driggs always forgot to put the telephone back in. It was a handsome room, she thought contentedly, not plain, like Charlotte's, or shabby, like Mrs. Green's.

"Well, I guess I'll have a nice lie-down, too," she whispered to herself, with such a wide yawn that she felt the hinge of her jaw nervously. But she still sat looking sleepily out of the window at the bare maple branches. The Monroes' maid starting for her Sunday off in Mrs. Monroe's claret-colored hat that Mrs. Driggs had often played bridge opposite. Terriss Jackson, just back from London, in new tweeds, stepping bouncingly past with a large walking stick and

the Jacksons' cocker spaniel. "Acting English!" Mrs. Driggs whispered, with a fat quiver of laughter.

There was the automobile, with Charlotte and Nancy Lou inside. Charlie blew the horn.

"Papa!

"*Papa!* Wake up! There's something wrong across the street!"

"Whasha ma'?" asked Mr. Driggs, drunken with sleep.

"Papa, come quick! Hurry! Miss Pyne came flying out of the house, and Charlotte went tearing in, and now Mrs. Green's called Charlie. Look, here he comes!" She flung up the window. "Charlie! Hoo-hoo! Charlie. What's a matter?"

Charlie ran across the street and right on to the new grass seed, but Mrs. Driggs was too excited to stop him.

"It's the old lady!" he called up, with a backward jerk of his thumb across his shoulder. "She started downstairs and tripped and fell the whole flight; they think her neck's broke. I gotta beat it for the doctor."

"For man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain: he heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them." Mr. Partridge read it beautifully, Carrie thought. The way his voice rose and fell, the way it trembled. Aunt Sarah's was a small heap of riches—a few thousand dollars, and Benjie. She had left it to Carrie.

"It seems too *awful* to be ninety-nine and *then* fall downstairs!" Carrie sobbed. "To be so nearly a hundred. Oh, Kate, if she'd only just lived to be a hundred!"

Kate wept, too, because Aunt Sarah had become a habit, because it was sad to think of ninety-nine years with as little love and laughter in them as there had been in Aunt Sarah's. Kate wept because she was excited and tired, because it made her sad to feel so little sorrow. She could have stopped crying at any moment, but she let her tears trickle on, glad that she could do this last thing for poor Aunt Sarah.

At first Carrie clung to Kate, repeating that she would never leave her, never! But there was her married brother in California. She hadn't seen him nor his wife for thirty-seven years; she had never seen her nieces, Emma, Caroline, and Anna. And they had asked her to come and make her home with them.

"Think of whole *hedges* of heliotrope!" Kate said, trying not to sound too eager, speaking from the mixed motives of longing to have Carrie off her hands and wanting something fresh and beautiful to happen to her. Hedges of heliotrope and a bright blue ocean coming into Carrie's life after these years of cheerfully, patiently watching day after day crumble into ash.

"I know—and Will and I were always just devoted. Caroline's named for me——"

"You'd be lovely and warm all the time."

"Oh, my! That would be heavenly!"

"You could send me oranges."

"No, Kate, no!" Carrie launched herself into Kate's arms. "I'll never leave you! I'll try to show my gratitude for all you've done for me! I'll never desert you in your loneliness!"

"I'll miss you like anything, Carrie, but I have Joe and Evelyn and Hope, and Charlotte and her children. I won't have a chance to be lonely. And I'm going to be very busy now. I'm going to paint again. You've thought of other people all your life; now think of yourself for a change."

And she has, too, Kate told herself, guiltily, because she longed so for an empty house, an empty studio. Of course I love poor Carrie, but, after all, he's her brother. Not to have to worry about anything for meals but tea and bread and butter and salad; not to have to talk in the middle of adding up accounts or when she wanted to read; to have the bathroom to herself. Above all, to have weeks, months, free for her painting.

"Emma and I were always very congenial. I don't believe I'd be any trouble to them. And what I could pay would help them, wouldn't it? Because, of course, I'd in*sist*. I mean, Will's wonderful—it isn't just because he's my brother, Kate, but anyway, what I mean is, he's always been too—well, I don't know what. I guess he don't know how to *push*, and you have to know how to *push* to get on in business. But I don't know ——"

"Think of seeing whole fields of California poppies, Carrie!"

"No, Kate, I've made up my mind." But presently she was saying: "Do you think my cocoa suit dyed black would do to travel in?" And at night she couldn't sleep for thinking of the unknown person who would have the upper berth, of deserts with cactus plants on them, and maybe cowboys, of changing at Chicago—suppose the taxi driver took her to some dreadful house?

She had to press her hands against her stomach whenever she realized that after all these years she was going to plunge into adventure. Her manner became a trifle patronizing toward acquaintances who were not going to California, but she still hardly believed she was going herself on the day they saw her off, with Joe's violets wabbling on her coat and Hoagland's chocolates under her arm.

The first thing Kate did was to clean her old palette and put her brushes to soak. And then she made a long list beginning:

"Cadmium yellow
Rose madder
Raw sienna ——"

But before she began to paint, the studio must be cleared out; and the bathroom, that still was haunted by Aunt Sarah. The hot-water bottles, the dangling red rubber tubes, the boxes and bottles and jars with

which she had tried to fight death—and then death had crept up behind her and pushed her downstairs. What a trick to play on a lady!

Then Kate and Effa painted the kitchen—bright blue, with white woodwork. And there were little things to do—the plants to be watered, an angel cake to make for the Altar Guild card party, a dress to smock for Hope. It was always nearly lunch time when she was ready to begin work in the studio, and it seemed inappropriate to recommence a career at quarter past twelve. Better wait until the next morning and start right.

Chapter Twenty-five

JOE had been to Boston. He had tried to persuade Evelyn to come with him, for she had been nervous and depressed, hiding from him, when he tried to help her, behind magazines, behind quick determined talk of outside things. He thought, if we could get away together and just be silly. "Do come, Evelyn! Don't you remember what fun we had there the time we bought cherries and rode in the swan boats?" But she had said "Boston!" in the same tone with which she said "Westlake!" and added that she couldn't leave Hope. No, she couldn't leave her with Joe's mother, or Charlotte. And there was a new black Matilda who would be too lonely. And at last she had cried, "Oh, Joe, don't *fuss* so!" and had run upstairs and slammed the door of Hope's room after her. But she wept when she kissed him good-by, and told him to hurry home.

He managed to get back a day earlier than he had expected. He had not telegraphed, for he wanted to surprise her. He took one of O'Leary's taxis, stopping at Clark's for some flowers. A strange young lady waited on him condescendingly, making him feel shy. He watched her disentangle the heap of dawn-colored roses with wet dark leaves, while the feeling of Evelyn surged through him.

"Sperrigus?"

"I— Excuse me?"

"I say-ed, sperrigus?"

"Oh! Oh no, thank you ——"

Driving in pouring rain through the puddles of Poor Farm Road, silver wings sprang out from the taxi, yet Joe wanted to get out and run. But when he reached the house it was empty.

He hurried through it, calling her. It was dark with the rain outside, empty and still, but not at peace. Did the house seem as lonely as this to her when he was out of it?

His whole being waited for her, as he had waited for his mother when he was a child. He needed Evelyn for safety. He was lost without her.

She came at last, with Hope. And he was safe again; the world was real, instead of a shifting mist that covered emptiness. The house no longer waited and listened. He wanted to cry from relief as he held her; he felt weak and young and at peace.

Then he saw that her eyes were red.

"Evelyn, what's the matter?"

"Nothing," she said in a muted voice. "The roses are lovely, Joe." And she let them fall back into their box.

"Something's wrong. You're sick."

"No, I'm all right."

At supper she cut up her food, lifted it to her mouth, put it back on her plate untouched. Sometimes she

sat in silence, sometimes she asked him a stranger's question: "Did you have nice weather?" "Did you go to the theater?"

"Evelyn, you must tell me what's wrong," he cried, and there was desperation in his voice.

She pushed back her full plate and went into the living room. Her hands twisted and tore her handkerchief.

"Joe, I'm not happy—I want to go away."

"I wanted you to come to Boston ——"

"Oh, I don't mean that! I mean go away for good."

"But why?"

"I love you—I love you *ever* so much—and Hope—but I'm so bored, I'm so sick of this life, I hate this place, I'm so tired ——"

He took her writhing hands in his; he held them still.

"I feel so restless, so nervous, Joe. I can't sleep; I can't stop crying at night when you're asleep. And nothing seems worth doing ——"

He held her hands in silence, looking at her in suffering pity.

"I'm young, I'm pretty; it's too soon for everything to be over. I don't give a damn about church fairs and growing sweet peas and making dresses for Hope. Oh, Joe, you don't know what the women here are like! Servants and new sweater stitches, and the emotion that goes into deciding whether to have a silk lamp shade or a parchment one. I could scream! I

will scream some day, and I won't be able to stop, and you'll have to put me in an asylum, unless I get away."

"It's too lonely for you out here. Let's try it in town."

"No! No!"

"But where do you want to go?"

"Mrs. Prather wants me to go to Paris with her, and then to the Lido. I *long* to go! The people I'm used to, the ways I understand—I ought never to have left them. I hate this place!"

"Perhaps we can go somewhere else, Evelyn."

"No, Joe, no. Don't you understand ——?"

"Understand? . . . You mean you're tired of me, too?"

She nodded, gasping for breath. She held his hand tight against her wet cheek.

"Do you want to leave me?"

"Joe, you're so good to me—why do I want to go?"

"You're tired, darling. I've let you work too hard. I'll send you away for a while, and then perhaps ——?"

"No, no, no! I want to go for good. Oh, Joe, this isn't a new idea! I tried to get over it because of Hope, but you don't know how unhappy I've been! I want to go! I've got to go!"

The life she longed for, where each step of the day was effortless delight. Held up by soft pillows to drink fragrant coffee from thin porcelain, lying deep

in a hot bath, just those things would be enough after the discomfort of her life now. Jokes and compliments, and people, heaps of people. Crazy, amusing, admiring people, instead of Hope—"Eat your nice spinach, darling. Now, Hope, eat it up!"—and Joe yawning over his book in the evening. Oh, the evenings! She wanted to slip into a scrap of bright chiffon and dance all night, and be told she was young and beautiful.

Oh, the relief if she could go free! And they wanted her to come back to them—her mother, Mrs. Prather, Ralph Levinson ——

It would be bitter grief to leave Hope. But Mrs. Prather hadn't asked her, and it would be no life for a child, this summer. Just this summer she wanted to be gay, reckless; then when she came back surely Joe would let her have the baby.

A black face appeared in the doorway. The whites of the eyes, the spectacles, their nose piece made comfortable by a winding of pale blue worsted, printed themselves on Joe's memory. The big mauve rosette of puckered lips parted to ask in a soft explosion that sighed itself to silence:

"Doan you-all wan' no *pie?*"

Evelyn turned away her face, distorted with weeping. Joe shook his head.

"No *caw*fee?"

"No, thank you, Matilda." He shut the door behind her and went back to Evelyn. She was picking up

and setting down a small crystal Buddha on the mantelpiece, watching, half hypnotized, the blur of shadow with its core of soft light rising and falling on the wall behind it; but as Joe touched her the Buddha leaped from her hand and fell to the floor.

"Perhaps you'll change your mind, Evelyn."

She shook her head, sobbing.

"It isn't Levinson, is it? Evelyn, you don't love him?"

"I don't know! I don't know! I thought I did once. I would have been happy with him, but now you've made me so I can't be happy with anyone—with him or with you. I just know I want to go out of your life. I've spoiled it enough."

"You've been my strength and my happiness; you still are; you always will be. You're mine forever, even if you leave me, and I'm yours. Everything we've known together—our secrets, Evelyn! The way we've laughed together, the things we've come through—don't you see how we belong to each other?"

"I want to go."

"You shall go, but you'll come back to me."

"Oh, I don't know, I don't know!"

"You came to me to help you, Evelyn, my Evelyn. I'll remember that forever."

Then as he began to tremble, as tears began to pour over his face, he understood what she had told him. He stumbled to the sofa, putting up his hands to hide

his tears, but they ran through his fingers. He could not stop them, he had lost control.

Evelyn knelt beside him, kissing his wet face, pressing her wet cheek to his.

"I'll stay, Joe. I'll stay, darling. Don't you hear me? Don't you hear what I'm saying?"

When he heard the sadness in her voice, when she lay cold and quiet and pitying in his arms, he knew he must let her go.

"Evelyn hasn't been very well, and she's going abroad for a rest and a change with her mother and some friends," Kate told people. "No, unfortunately, Joe's too busy to get away just now. He and Hope are going to spend the summer with me. You know I've been fairly rattling round in the house since Carrie went to California."

Chapter Twenty-six

J. HARTLEY HARRISON, his mother, and his grandmother, sat about a neatly laid fireplace that held no ashes and was surrounded by Christmas presents and Gift Shoppe souvenirs of summer holidays—a "witch broom," a Cape Cod fire lighter, a toddy spoon, a never-used trivet for a teapot or a plate of muffins. In the dining room, a spick-and-span continuation of safe browns and greens sprinkled with minute bits of mahogany, they could see Ida filling the water glasses.

"Well, what's new, Hartley?" Mrs. Harrison asked, folding up the napkin she was embroidering with a fat teapot and "Polly put the kettle on, we'll all have tea" in blue cross-stitch. But her son was too good a gossip to yield his real news so lightly.

"It was certainly a made-to-order spring day."

"Yes, it was. I was sorry I wore my high shoes."

"Asparagus'll be getting cheaper."

"Yes, indeed, mother, and you'll like *that*, won't you?"

"No more than you will, Sadie. Gracious! A body'd think no one in this house ate but me!"

"Dinner's served," said Ida.

"Dinner? Oh-a—Ida! I think it would be nice

if you struck the new gong, just the way I showed you. I guess you just didn't remember."

Ida's face turned scarlet. She gave a quick nervous tap to the Chinese gong.

"Oh, I didn't mean *now;* I meant *next* time. No, that's all right. That's all right. Dinner, Hartley. Dinner, mother."

"That girl don't hit the gong right," said old Mrs. Hartley.

"I know; she doesn't bring out the beauty at all. I showed her and showed her, but she got sort of embarrassed, for some reason. Dinner, mother."

"Seems a pity not to hit it right, when Cousin Fannie brought it all the way from China."

"Slo-ow and sing-ing!" Hartley demonstrated.

"You show her, son; she'd take it from you. Dinner, mother."

"I'm not deaf, Sadie! Mercy! Dinner, mother, dinner, mother!"

The steam from the platter of boiled fowl and rice dimmed Hartley's spectacles, so that he had to wipe them with one of Aunt Martha's Christmas-present handkerchiefs after he finished carving. "Now, grandma, here's a choice portion. This looks good to a hungry woodsman, girls!" For he no longer avoided starches, but now was interested in cutting out red meat. "I had my Sunday-school boys out in the woods behind Joe Green's house this afternoon. We identified fourteen birds, and one I couldn't quite place, with

a call like this ——" He laid down his knife and fork and whistled, but neither Mrs. Hartley nor Mrs. Harrison could quite place it, either, though Mrs. Hartley thought it sounded like *something.*

"By the way—" His ladies pricked up their ears at his carefully casual tone. "A funny thing happened this afternoon. . . . A little more rice and gravy, grandma? . . . When we were in the woods Joe Green came tearing through as if he was going to a fire, and I called to him and so did Sonny Boy Driggs, but he went plunging right ahead as if he didn't see or hear us."

"Maybe he was drunk."

"Oh no, grandma, I wouldn't like to think that."

"I saw him this afternoon, too," Mrs. Harrison put in. "Through, mother? Through, Hartley? Sure? Very well, Ida, you may clear. I stopped in at the station to get a new time-table, and he was seeing his wife off on the four-fifteen. She was crying."

"I think there's something wrong there," Mrs. Hartley said.

"H'm! mother—h'm!"

"What are you humming about, Sadie?"

"Some other subject while Ida's passing, if you don't mind, mother. Well, it was a lovely afternoon to take the kiddies to the woods, son."

The spoons made a sucking sound as they helped themselves to rocking chocolate blancmange turned out of a mold with an ear of corn on top.

"Do you think they'll get a divor ——?"

"Ida's coming with cream, mother. Well, spring is really here, I guess."

"Yes, we saw a yellow-spotted tortoise moving under the leaves in the pond."

"Ugh!" said Mrs. Hartley, taking more than her share of the cream. "Disgusting!"

"Mrs. Green says Joe's wife's just going away for a little rest and change," said Mrs. Harrison, eagerly, as the swing door swished behind Ida. "But you know her; anything connected with that wonderful son of hers is perfect."

"I wonder if things *are* wrong in that quarter?" said Hartley, looking bright and pleased. "Tck! I hope not; I sincerely hope not!"

"It's a skinch they are, though," remarked his grandmother, who liked to feel she was keeping up with modern slang.

"I was just wondering— Oh no!"

"Now, Hartley, what?"

"Nothing, really; it was wrong of me to suggest it."

"Now, son, no fair teasing!"

"Well, I was simply thinking about that Mr. Levinson I met at their home. He looked to me like a victim of the tender passion, and milady didn't seem exactly indifferent."

"My goodness! I— *Mother*, what *are* you doing?"

"Picking up my handkerchief, with your kind permission."

"He's been here a lot this winter—at least that big olive-green car has. . . . What, mother?"

"I said, can't a body pick up her handkerchief?"

"And that time Joe was in Boston. Remember, Hartley, when we asked them to the sing and he was in Boston so she didn't come? Well, that man was staying at The Inglenook, because I met Miss Stamper at the library and she told me so; she said he was there four days, and he was at the table next to hers, but he wasn't there for any of his meals, hardly. I don't believe we'd have to work overtime to guess who he was having them with! Miss Stamper said she couldn't help sort of liking him. She dropped her knitting bag once, and she said the way he picked it up and handed it back to her made her feel like a queen in exile. Well, well! Poor Joe!"

"Tck! Tck! Poor Joe, indeed!"

"Well, I guess Ida'd like to clear. I move we adjourn to the parlor. Anyone second the motion?"

Joe had not seen Hartley holding a white flower and surrounded by little boys to whom he had been explaining what bees did about pollen. People in the woods, to be hurried past, that was all.

After he had taken Evelyn to the train, after their cold sad kiss of good-by, he drove home, shuddering and yawning. He longed for sleep. But he could not go into the house that was really haunted now. He

left the Ford and plunged into the woods, going on until it was dark. He tripped over a root and lay where he fell, face down, in anguish, pressing closer to the earth, his fingers tearing up the mold. He knew she would never come back. To press deeper and deeper into the comforting earth, until it received him, covered him, made him its own again. To have this aching body broken open, to be free!

Rain began to fall, sounding like little feet pattering over the dead leaves. He lay there all night, utterly crushed, crumbled. A deadly drowsiness numbed him after the dumb anguish.

In the morning he was almost too stiff to move, feverish, and shot through by flashes of pain. As he limped out of the woods everything was strange and vivid. The weeping-willow branches flowed like water weeds in a stream against the wet gray sky. Starlings, glossy black swelling in light and curving to shadow, chattered on the telegraph poles that held wires humming with life and death. Smoke came from the chimney of his darling's empty house, that Effa was getting ready to close, and melted into the wet sky. He saw everything through thin crystal—a touch would shatter it; the world would end.

In the bright green meadow where every ditch and little stream was full of cowslips that looked like rivulets and pools of pure sunlight, Hope was playing alone, the youngest angel in the streets of gold.

Kate was busy, worried, happy again, because Joe had rheumatic fever and needed her. Charlotte took Hope, and Kate flung herself into nursing. And Joe was grateful and patient, smiling at her so that she had to run into the bathroom and cry on to the laundry bag.

"He says he's well enough to go back to work to-morrow," she said on the afternoon in May when Charlotte brought Hope to 29 Chestnut Street. "He seems almost like himself, only thin. Well, you've been wonderful to take care of Hope, Charlotte."

"She's a handful, Aunt Kate, I warn you! I don't think she means to be naughty, but she's so full of life. It seems to me I was sending all three of them to bed all the time, and my two are generally so good. This morning I came home from taking Nancy Lou to the dentist, and Hope and Sonny Boy had printed all over the new white paneling in the hall with that toy printing press Carrie Pyne gave him ages ago and he's never *thought* of using, but Hope dug it out, and what did they print but 'Her unchaste bed proved a springboard to a throne' in capital letters, all over! Sonny Boy says they copied it out of a book. What book can we have with *that* kind of a thing in it?"

"History, I guess. I'm so sorry, Charlotte. Yet you can't help loving the little thing."

"I know. You spank her hands, and the next minute she has her arms around your neck. Is Evelyn coming back, Aunt Kate?"

"I don't believe so."

"Neither do Hoagland and I. She'll certainly be wanting Hope. I will say for her she adored the child. Poor Joe!"

Poor Joe, my poor darling Joe! Kate thought, going out into the kitchen. There was a smell of hot toast mingling with the fragrance of lilacs and newly cut grass that came in through the screen door. Hope was having her supper at the kitchen table, talking eagerly to Effa, who now and then contributed: "Uh-huh," "Sure!" "You tell 'em, kid!" That girl! Such a way to talk! But she loved the baby.

At the sight of Kate, Hope began to laugh, showing her enchanting little teeth, and Kate began to laugh, too. "Now what's so funny, Goosie?" And she kissed the top of the silky head, thinking of Jodie having his supper here, ever so long ago.

Oh how can I be so happy when my Joe is unhappy? But I don't believe he minds so much, after all, she thought, not wanting to admit that he was suffering, because then she would have to suffer, too. He's thinner—but then he's been so ill. And he's cheerful; he eats and makes jokes. But she was pierced by his shining eyes, that shone clear, out of torture. Once she cried: "Oh, if all this had never happened—if you had never met her!" But he answered: "No, you don't understand."

He knew utter loss, deeper than if Evelyn had died, for then she would not have left him of her own will.

But he knew that nothing was wasted—not one word, one silence that had been between them, not one hour of sorrow; nothing could have been spared.

He knew Evelyn was suffering, too. He wanted to console her.

He dreaded the lessening of his anguish because it drew him from her. But he never tried to hold it as the high tide withdrew. He could not have suffered so, and lived. He felt life coming back to him; other pleasures pierced through to him, other pains that were not from Evelyn. He accepted them. Suffering had given him the courage to accept whatever happiness and comfort life brought.

He was walking home one afternoon when he heard some one call behind him:

"Hello, Joe Green! Going to a funeral?"

"Why, hello, Opal!"

"I thought maybe you wouldn't remember me. It's fierce the way people round here are troubled with loss of memory."

"I haven't seen you for ever so long."

"I've been in New York. Gee, it's hot!"

"Come on into McCardle's and have a soda."

"Isn't he the brave boy, tossing away his reputation just like that!"

He had forgotten how blue her eyes were, how ridiculously long her eyelashes, stuck with lumps of mascara. And for a moment he wanted achingly to pull her off her stool, to put his arms tight about her slen-

der roundness, to press his face into her warm white curve of throat, forgetting everything else. Something quivered about her, promising—promising ——

"It's a pity you wouldn't put some *ice* cream in this soda, Roy," she was saying to the clerk. "Well! That's better! Gee! This tastes nice and cool, Joe!"

"Isn't that that Mendoza girl with Joe Green?" Mrs. Harrison asked Mrs. Jackson in the back of the store. "A can of violet talc, Mr. McCardle, and a bottle of citronella; I guess that's all. Oh, and a small box of mints if you're sure they're fresh. . . . *Look!* Look at her going out of the door! You can see right through. I don't believe she has a stitch of underclothes on. Dis*gus*ting!"

"I was awful sorry to hear you'd had trouble, Joe," Opal said as they walked along Maple Street.

"I— Thank you, Opal."

"It's tough when you're crazy about somebody and anything happens. I was crazy about a fellah in New York—gee, I certainly had it bad. Then he died that year there was so much flu. I nearly went crazy. I tried to take poison, but the old fools pumped me out, and here I am. So I mean—I sort of know how you feel ——"

She was pulling leaves from the privet hedge as they walked past the rectory. Her face was turned away from him.

"Listen, Joe—things get better. Gee! I just hated myself when I began to sit up and take notice, but

we're human. I remember the first time I forgot my friend after he died. I met a fellah and we went to the movies; it was a Harold Lloyd. Laugh! Oh, boy! And I felt kinda crazy about this other fellah, too; he was a nice kid. I never thought about my friend at all until the orchestra begun to play 'Somewhere a Voice Is Calling,' and that made me think of him— Well, anyway, I mean things get better; you think you're through, but things kinda turn up ——"

"Do they, Opal?"

He heard in her words the eternal promise; he believed and was comforted. Kate heard him whistling in the bathroom as he got ready for supper. But, holding the towel, he stopped, forgetting to dry his face, forgetting to move, lost in sudden longing for Evelyn, violent, terrible.

Chapter Twenty-seven

EACH June Mrs. Green sent Mr. Driggs one Killarney rose, or he sent one to her. These were not tender tokens, but flaunting boasts, the one whose bush bloomed first putting on airs of insufferable superiority. This morning Kate went to the door with a dust-cloth in her hand, for Effa was busy baking, to find Mrs. Driggs, mauve with heat, holding the rose.

"Mr. Driggs made me promise to bring it right over, for fear the sun would open yours. Whew! Hot enough for you?"

"Oh, so he's beaten me! And I was *just* ready to burst! Come in. It's cooler inside."

"Hoagland says Joe's bringing Hope home this afternoon. Whew!"

"Here's a fan. Yes, isn't it an awful day for them to be traveling?"

Mrs. Driggs flapped the palm-leaf fan slowly, and panted.

"I guess it's because it's the first real hot spell we feel it so. You wait; there'll be a storm before night. What smells so good?"

"The honeysuckle on the side porch. The bees are just thick around it."

"No, I mean something baking."

"Oh, Effa's making gingerbread animals for Hope. Let's have a few! And I have some root beer on ice. We've just made it."

"Oh, now, don't bother ——"

"No bother. I feel empty myself; I've been rushing round so hard, getting ready for them."

"Well, that certainly goes to the right spot!" Mrs. Driggs wiped away a mustache of creamy foam. "You'll be glad to have Hope back, I guess."

"Indeed I will. You know she's been with her mother seven months. I guess she'll seem quite grown up to me. Effa and I are just as excited as anything."

"Her mother'll miss her."

"Yes, she will, dreadfully. She's at such a darling age now. I remember when Joe was her age; there was something new all the time. I don't believe I could have stood it to miss a *day*."

"Joe glad she's coming home?"

"Why, of *course*, Mrs. Driggs! Only, you know it's a funny thing," said Kate in a burst of confidence: "last summer I thought Hope would be all the comfort in the world to him, because he certainly does adore his little girl, but somehow it seemed sometimes as if she was making him feel worse. I couldn't exactly put my finger on it, and perhaps I was just imagining ——"

"Maybe it's because he loves the mother too much, and Hope keeps reminding him." Mrs. Driggs flipped the gingerbread crumbs from her bosom, her eyes star-

ing at the empty fireplace as if she were seeing something else. "I guess you can't love more than one person best."

"But where's Hope?" Kate cried, plunging downstairs to fling her arms around Joe. "Darling, you look so hot and tired! Where's Hope?"

"I'm going to let Evelyn keep her."

"*Joe!*"

"Mother, I can't talk about it yet. Evelyn needs Hope, and Hope needs Evelyn. Evelyn—Evelyn's more— I want them to be together ——"

"But, Joe! Won't she ever let you see her again?"

"Why, of course, mother! Evelyn's still Evelyn."

"I ——"

"And there's something else. I'm going to let Evelyn divorce me. Don't say anything—don't say anything!"

She could not look at his despairing face, that he was trying to control. She kissed him, her arms tight around him, and said with unnatural briskness:

"You go and have a nice bath—you're all hot and dirty—and then lie down till supper time. Joe!"

He looked down over the banisters. His mouth was stretched into a smile, but his eyes were so big, so shining that she was afraid they would well with tears, that tears would overflow, streaking the dust of travel.

"Lie down in my room; it's the coolest."

The world was breathless, still as glass; the sky grew

dark and blind. Kate tiptoed to the door of her room once or twice, but Joe lay motionless, and at last she sent Effa home. The street was empty; the world was empty. Her nerves were quivering; she was caught in the stillness as if she were caught in the water at the edge of a great waterfall, sliding glass-smooth toward plunging chaos.

Thunder spoke far away, drew nearer. Then rain fell loudly, beating the leaves, drumming on the roof. The white glare of lightning showed a writhing world; the thunder crackled lightly. That means it's near, Kate thought.

Joe opened his eyes. He was cool and clean; his head was steady. It had been months since he had slept so. Night after night he had read in bed until his head was swimming and his eyes smarting, to keep away thoughts that came with the dark. But now that he could no longer say, "Perhaps—some day ——" he was like a drowning man who, fighting the sea a long time, at last gives up.

"Joe? Are you awake?"

"Yes, just."

"Don't tell me you slept through that storm! Here's a candle; the lights are all out. Aren't you hungry? It's after nine o'clock."

They spoke to each other quietly now and then as they ate their supper—quivering jellied soup, a big bowl of chicken salad, a frosty pitcher of iced coffee,

flaky hot crescent rolls from the Vienna Bakery, with curls of butter that Kate had made according to Charlotte's description of the way they had butter in Italy, the kind of cheese that Joe liked and that made her hold her nose, and the raspberry water ice she had ordered from Goff's to celebrate his return and Hope's. He had not eaten anything since lunch the day before, and he found he was half starved. The food and drink, the cool quiet, gave him strength again.

"I sent Effa home. I'll just pile the things up in the sink. She said to leave them. I'll be in in a minute."

But he followed her into the kitchen, as he used to when he was a little boy, back into the dining room, out into the kitchen.

"There go the lights on again. Don't you want to look at the paper?"

He took it, and sat down by the lamp. She got out her drawing board, her paint box and glass of water, and began to work, stealing glances at him, aching for him. His head was bent over the paper, but he hadn't turned a page in half an hour.

"I'm trying to design some scenery. Don't you ever feel like doing any more? You used to do such wonderful things ——"

"I'll try some, sometime," he said, not because he meant to, but to comfort her, so the air would not be heavy with the intense emotion of her suffering for him, so that he could be still.

"I'm having the awfulest time. They asked me to plan a scene for 'The Steadfast Lead Soldier'—you know, that Hans Andersen fairy-tale. The children are going to do it. Nancy Lou's going to be the little dancer, though she's too fat, *I* think—a regular little butter ball. I just can't get anything decent."

"Let's see."

"No—it's awful!" She crumpled her sketch into a wad. "*You* try, Joe."

"I haven't any ideas."

But he fastened a fresh sheet of paper to the drawing board and began making a pool of color in the paint-box lid.

"There was a castle, wasn't there?"

"Wait. I'll read that part to you." She squatted on the floor by the bookcase and pulled out the stout little blue-and-gold volume with the broken back.

" 'There were once five-and-twenty leaden soldiers——' Wait a minute—here: 'A pretty little paper castle. . . . In front of the castle stood little trees, round a small piece of looking-glass that was meant to represent a transparent lake. Wax swans were swimming on its surface, that reflected back their image. . . . A diminutive lady . . . . stood at the castle's open door. She, too, was cut out of paper; but she wore a dress of the clearest muslin, and a narrow blue ribbon over her shoulders, like a scarf; and in the middle of this was placed a tinsel rose, as big as her whole face. The little lady stretched out both her

arms ——' Oh, well, that hasn't anything to do with the scenery."

But she went on reading to herself, squatting there, reading to the end.

"The lead soldier was now lighted up by the flames, and felt a tremendous degree of heat; but whether it proceeded from the real fire, or from the fire of love, he could not exactly tell. . . . He looked at the little lady, and she looked at him, and he felt himself melting away; still he stood firm with his gun on his shoulder. The door now happened to open, and the wind caught up the dancer, who fluttered . . . right into the stove beside the lead soldier, and was instantly consumed by the flame. The lead soldier melted down to a lump . . . in the shape of a little leaden heart. Of the dancer nothing remained but the tinsel rose, and that was as black as a cinder."

Joe's head, with its cowlick, was bent close to the board; his legs were twined around each other. A tip of tongue stuck out between his lips as it had when he was an absorbed little boy. He's really interested, Kate thought, so relieved that she could have wept for joy. And the cowlick made her love him so that it was all she could do not to jump up and kiss the top of his head.

It was raining again, quietly now. The scent of wet honeysuckle came in at the windows. She picked up the sweater she had been knitting for Hope, and went on with it, not thinking of what she was doing, but

soothed by the slipping of blue loop after loop and the dropping of the rain. Every minute was precious to her. Now he is more at peace—now—now ——

I know what I'll do, she thought. I'll get his things down from the attic, the old theater and all his materials, and I'll fix up the studio so he can have it every bit for himself. If only I can get him really interested in his scenery it will help him more than anything else in the world. That's the work he's always loved. And he is interested now; he has forgotten everything else —I can tell from his face.

What did it matter that she had a still life started, a jar of creamy peonies against a background of the old kimona embroidered with sea turtles, in careless folds it had taken her half a morning to arrange? She could finish it in her own room, or, if she couldn't, what she really needed was out-of-door sketching.

I'm going to fix it for him to-night, she thought. I can't wait! As soon as he goes to bed I'll get to work. He's never had a real place all of his own here. His room's the size of a match box, anyway, and then I have a lot of my things under his bed—the piece box and the cutting table and my patterns. I'll have it all done to surprise him to-morrow!

When the crack under his door was dark she carried the stepladder up from the cellar and began taking down her paintings—Nellie Verlaine in Grecian costume, fish, onions, the apple blossoms in a stoneware crock she had really finished last month. She pulled

pictures out from under the couch, from behind the screen. The unfinished portrait of her husband. "Oh, Joe, I wish you were here to help Jodie," she whispered.

What heaps of forgotten things were hidden by the divan's denim skirts—the box of Christmas-tree ornaments, the old *Art Interchanges*, Jodie's Dormouse costume for the scenes from "Alice in Wonderland" at school. She had put it away, thinking he could use it again some day—had he ever been as small as that?

Each person who had lived in the house seemed to have left something in the studio, as one tide brings glass-brown seaweed to a pool in the rocks, another a fluted shell, another a crab scuttling sideways on fragile blue claws, stirring up a white cloud of sand. Joe and Jodie, Lizzie Kelley—here was the awful sofa pillow Lizzie had embroidered with poppies for a Christmas surprise—Charlotte's Gibson pictures behind the screen, Aunt Sarah's big chair, humble forgotten treasures of Carrie's, Effa's lost whisk broom, Hope's blackboard and colored chalks. Only Evelyn had left no trace behind her.

Kate piled the things up in her own room, pushed them under her bed. Plenty of time to put them away properly later. Up in the attic she found Joe's old toy theater, his tool chest, and the boxes of scenery he had made, and carried them down.

Her hot wet face was dust streaked; she had broken two finger nails. She would not admit to herself that

she was tired, but things began to leap from her hands; she was twitching and throbbing. Her mind seethed with confused thoughts—these torn tissue-paper wings that she had veined and spotted with gold paint for that solid fairy, Charlotte; the gingerbread animals Hope would never eat; the little trickles down the sides of Mrs. Driggs' face this morning, like the rivers marked on a lilac map; the thing Mrs. Driggs had said about loving one person best, so surprising from her.

I love Joe best; Joe loves Evelyn best; Evelyn loves Hope best.

Of course Joe would let Evelyn have Hope if he thought it would make her happier. He still thinks Evelyn's perfect. . . . How *can* he?

Joe a divorced man ——

Perhaps she and Joe could go abroad sometime now—not to the France she longed for—that would remind him too much—but Switzerland, maybe. She saw them eating crescent rolls like the ones from the Vienna Bakery, and flower-scented honey, in a chalet like her little old stamp box, or hanging from snowy mountains into the bright blue air, reaching over juting ledges to gather that homely but exciting winter-woolen-underwear flower, the edelweiss.

She could paint, and he could get material for his scenery. She saw herself, gracious in black velvet, sitting in a stage box beside him as a curtain rose. She heard the gasp of delight from the great audience at the beauty of the stage setting. "Whose work is

that?" "A new scenic artist—young, but he's already a power. Joseph Montgomery Green. See, there he is with his mother ——"

The steadfast lead soldier—the little dancer stretching out her arms to him—but the fire was too much for her; just the tinsel rose was left, and that was as black as a cinder ——

Mercy! Here was her old wine-red Tennyson, down behind the divan, and as dusty as could be, bulging over a wad of dead flowers. She shook them out and saw a penciled line and a date along the margin:

> Heart, are you great enough
> For a love that never tires?
> O heart, are you great enough for love?

What did the date mean, and why had she marked it, so long ago? She couldn't remember.

Then as her hands pulled out, folded, put away, her mind took on the clairvoyance that sometimes comes with physical exhaustion. The confused thoughts became clear, like the clear crystal a glass blower blows from the boiling mass.

Perhaps Joe is blessed among men, because there is bitter grief in his heart, she thought. Perhaps only those who know grief are truly blessed, are truly alive, kept quick by their pain. Perhaps a heart must be broken before life can wash through it.

She thought of people she knew, contented, compla-

cent, men and women who had died long ago, and yet still moved about, eating, talking.

Yet I feel alive, and I have been a happy woman, she thought, as she worked on, alone in the sleeping world. I have had so much happiness. Of course now I'm wretched for my poor Joe ——

But the feeling that flowed beneath the thought was happy. He is mine again, for me to comfort, for me to take care of.

If he could have Evelyn, if they could be together as they used to be, I would give anything, even if it meant never seeing him again. But under the unselfishness lay the ancient depths of self, happy because he needed her.

The bravest thing about Joe is that he never acts as if he were being brave, she told herself with her new clarity of vision. I wouldn't be big enough for that. I'd have to let people see how brave I was being. I'd have to be able to admire myself as the heroine of a tragedy, but Joe's big enough for grief. Joe is blessed among men.

Cocks crowed outside, and day began to dim the electric light. The studio was ready for him. She had been so interested she had never thought of the time. "I'm so tired—I'm so tired—" she murmured, leaning against the window, at peace.

The sky was flooded with living pink, each cloud was rimmed with glory. How she would love to make

just a quick sketch of it. Joe's old paint box, lying by her hand, almost tempted her to try then and there. But she was too sleepy. She must go to bed now. Perhaps she would set her alarm clock and get up to paint the dawn to-morrow morning.

THE END

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